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POPULAR

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

DETECTIVE

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white dress, is depicted in a state of shock or fear, with her mouth open and hands raised. Behind her, a large, dark silhouette of a cat with glowing blue eyes looms against a red background.

The Cat FROM SIAM

*A Mystery
Novelet*
By FREDRIC
BROWN

GUNMETAL FINISH

A Steve Koski Novelet
By STEWART STERLING



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POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXVII, No. 2

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

SEPTEMBER, 1949

FEATURED NOVELET



The Cat from Siam

by Fredric Brown

Both the cop and a cat knew that Brian Carter just could not be the murderer—and when the cat began talking, the cop listened carefully! 9

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Official Business



A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

ON THE entire east coast of Honduras there was only one sight that could have made the men aboard the cutter *Albareda* forget they had a corpse for company.

That sight was the girl on the beach.

She had stepped out of a skimpy bathing suit and was drying herself on an even skimpier towel when the cutter, its big diesel throttled down to a murmur, came nosing cautiously in through the mouth of the lagoon. The island boy, swinging the lead in the bow, was the first to see her. He forgot to call the mark on the lead-line.

When the captain of the cutter, a sun-blackened young man in dungarees and a singlet, shouted at him from the wheel on the roof of the deck house, the boy pointed.

The girl looked up at the captain's shout. For a moment, seeing the boat there, she was too startled to move. She made a pretty picture for the three passengers sitting under the deck canopy. She wore a white rubber bathing cap and white rubber slippers, with nothing in between but golden-brown tanned flesh and the skimpy towel. Behind her, white beach blazing in the sun stretched away in a wide curve to the cluster of palm-thatched huts that was the lagoon village half a mile beyond.

Murder on Ice

Coco palms grew along the beach, their broad fans rustling in the breeze that had kept the girl from hearing the mutter of the diesel. Pelicans on motionless wings soared low across the surface of the lagoon, hunting fish. Over all, the hot tropical sky burned like a blue flame.

One of the pelicans folded its wings and dived, beak first. The splash broke the girl's

spell. She snatched up a robe that lay on the sand and fled, a flash of golden skin and white slippers among the coco palms. The captain of the cutter shouted again at the open-mouthed island boy.

"Rafael! Swing that lead! Are you trying to put us aground?"

One of the passengers said to the man next to him, "I wouldn't mind going aground here for good, if they're all like that."

The other man grunted. The third passenger said, "What are we coming in here for?"

The man who had spoken first nodded at the big box lashed to the deck in the shade of the canopy.

"The ice is nearly gone. It melts fast in this weather."

The other man shuddered.

"We've got a corpse to bury," Captain Bill Butler said. "But first we have to find out—which among us is the killer!"

That's the action-promising opening of **MURDER OFF HONDURAS**, by David Dodge, featured novelet in the next great issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**.

Two Killers

Captain Bill Butler wasn't long in making the acquaintance of "the girl on the beach." He found her to be an English speaking pip-pin named Hope—or Esperanza, as she was known to the Spanish-speaking Caribs and *zambo* shark-fishermen in the God-forsaken village where she lived, three days by boat from the nearest port.

There was a mystery about her, and what she was doing there, just as there was about the fat man who lay dead in the melting ice on the boat. He had been one of a party of four Bill Butler had taken out tarpon

fishing. Following a poker game in the galley, in which he had been the winner, the fat man had remained behind to count his money. Bill had found him afterwards, still sitting there—with a broken neck.

Bill had searched him. All of the money the man had won was gone, and the wallet from his pocket.

The action that followed was swift and terrible. Esperanza, the girl, was with Bill when he cornered the first suspect.

"So it was you," Bill said, closing in on him.

The first suspect's eyes moved. They looked at Bill. He began to tremble. Then he took a step toward Bill, raising his hands pleadingly. Suddenly, Esperanza screamed. From behind Bill, a second of the suspects moved in.

Knives, Guns and Treachery!

An arm came over Bill's shoulder and across his face, caught the point of his jawbone below the ear, tightened around his head, and yanked him back against the doorway of the foc's'le with a twist that made his neck crack.

Esperanza screamed again. Bill, off balance and with one arm pinned by the weight of his own body against the door-frame, was helpless. A hand was pulling his free wrist behind him, trying to force it up in a hammer lock.

He struggled to call out to Esperanza, tell her to get away, but the fingers were like hooks under his jaw and the wrist covered his mouth.

He set his neck muscles in time to prevent a second strong tug from breaking his spine, and then the roll of the cutter pushed him away from the doorframe and his arm was free. He caught the wrist that was across his mouth and tore it loose, knowing he was too late to save himself.

For the first suspect now had snatched a knife from the rack on the bulkhead and was coming at him, his eyes glaring, his lips drawn back over his teeth.

Bill was caught between two killers!

He kicked out at the one with the knife. The knife struck powerfully with the weapon, his arm sweeping around and up from the side, as Bill ripped his other wrist free of the grip of the man at his back.

The grunt and the solid *thunk!* of the

(Continued on page 95)



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RESCUE CRAFT ...

JEEPERS! THERE
SHE IS!



JACK LEVEL AND LOU MCKIEL, EX-SEABEES,
ARE ON THE SECOND DAY OF A ROUGH
RUN DOWN THE COAST IN THEIR NEWLY-
PURCHASED SECONDHAND BOAT, WHEN...

MY ENGINE'S DEAD! ARE YOU
THE RESCUE CRAFT?

NO, BUT I DO
KNOW ENGINES.
HEAVE US A
LINE



20
MINUTES
LATER

WE'RE BLOWING
ONTO THE
SHOALS!

TELL YOUR DAD
WE'RE O.K., MISS.
THE ENGINE'LL
START NOW



YOU GOT US OUT
OF A NASTY FIX.
I WAS ABSOLUTELY
HELPLESS

CATFISH SHOALS
HAVE BEEN BAD NEWS
FOR MANY A VESSEL



COME ABOARD WHEN
WE ANCHOR. WE'RE
INVITED FOR CHOW

I'LL START SUPPER,
DAD, WHILE YOU
MEN CLEAN UP



SAY, THIS BLADE'S
A PIP. NEVER GOT
RID OF WHISKERS
FASTER OR EASIER

IT'S A THIN
GILLETTE
... AND
PLENTY KEEN



WE PLAN TO FIX
UP OUR TUB AND
START A FISHING
SERVICE

THAT'S A WASTE OF TALENT.
MY CONSTRUCTION FIRM
NEEDS MEN LIKE YOU

HE'S CERTAINLY
HANDSOME



TAKE IT FROM ME, MEN, YOU GET
SWELL-LOOKING, COMFORTABLE SHAVES
WITH THIN GILLETTES. THEY'RE THE KEENEST
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*Both the cop and a cat knew that Carter
just could not be the killer — and when
the cat began talking, the cop listened!*

THE Cat FROM Siam

*I ran to the front door
and outside*

a novelet by

CHAPTER I

FREDRIC BROWN

THE LOCKED DOOR

WE WERE in the middle of our third game of chess when it happened.

It was late in the evening—eleven thirty-five, to be exact. Jack Sebastian and I were in the living room of my two-

room bachelor apartment. We had the chess game set up on the card table in front of the fireplace, in which the gas grate burned cheerfully.

Jack looked cheerful too. He was wreathed in smoke from his smelliest

pipe and he had me a pawn down and held a positional edge. I'd taken the first two games, but this one looked like his. It didn't look any less so when he moved his knight and said, "Check." My rook was forked along with the king. There didn't seem to be anything I could do about it except give up the rook for the knight.

I looked up at the Siamese cat who was sleepily watching us from her place of vantage on the mantel.

"Looks like he's got us, Beautiful," I said. "One should never play with a policeman."

"I wish you wouldn't do that, dammit," Jack said. "You give me the willies."

"Anything's fair in love and chess," I told him. "If it gives you the willies to have me talk to a cat, that's fine. Besides, Beautiful doesn't kibitz. If you see her give me any signals, I'll concede."

"Go ahead and move," he said, irritably. "You've got only one move that takes you out of check, so make it. I take your rook, and then—"

There was a noise, then, that I didn't identify for a second because it was made up of a *crack* and a *ping* and a *thud*. It wasn't until I turned to where part of the sound came from that I realized what it had been. There was a little round hole in the glass of the window.

The *crack* had been a shot, the *ping* had been the bullet coming through the glass—and the *thud* had been the bullet going into the wall behind me!

But by the time I had that figured out, the chessmen were spilling into my lap.

"Down, quick!" Jack Sebastian was saying sharply.

WHETHER I got there myself, or Jack pushed me there, I was on the floor. And by that time I was thinking.

Grabbing the cord of the lamp, I jerked the plug out of the wall and we were in darkness except for the reddish-yellow glow of the gas grate in the fireplace. The handle of that was on Jack's side, and I saw him, on his knees, reach out and turn it.

Then there was complete darkness. I looked toward where the window should be, but it was a moonless night and I

couldn't see even the faintest outline of the window. I slid sideways until I bumped up against the sofa. Jack Sebastian's voice came to me out of the darkness.

"Have you got a gun, Brian?" he asked.

I shook my head, and then realized he couldn't see me. "No," I said. "What would I be doing with a gun?"

My voice, even to me, sounded hoarse and strained. I heard Jack moving.

"The question is," he said, "what's the guy outside doing with one? Anybody after you, pal?"

"N-no," I said. "At least, not—"

I heard a click that told me Jack had found the telephone. He gave a number and added, "Urgent, sister. This is the police." Then his voice changed tone and he said, "Brian, what's the score? Don't you know anything about who or why—"

He got his connection before he could finish the question and his voice changed pitch again.

"Jack Sebastian, Cap," he said. "Forty-five University Lane. Forty-five University Lane. Somebody just took a pot-shot in the window here. Head the squad cars this way from all directions they can come from. Especially the campus—that's the logical way for him to lose himself if he's on foot. Start 'em. I'll hold the line."

Then he was asking me again, "Brian, what can I add? Quick."

"Tell 'em to watch for a tall, slender, young man," I said. "Twenty-one years old, thin face, blond hair."

"The hell," he said. "*Alister Cole*?"

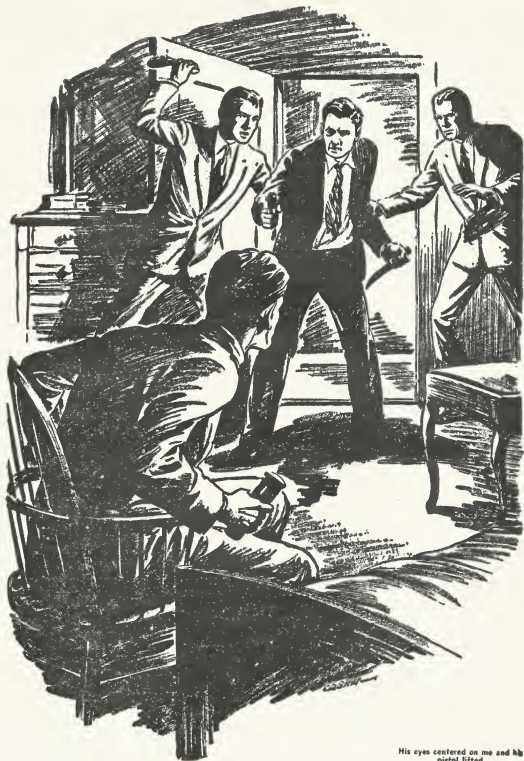
"Could be," I told him. "It's the only guess I can make. I can be wrong, but—"

"Hold it." Whoever he'd been talking to at the police station was back on the line. Without mentioning the name, Jack gave the description I'd just given to him. He said, "Put that on the radio and come back in."

Again to me, "Anything else?"

"Yes," I said. "Tell 'em to converge those squad cars on Doc Roth's place, Two-ten University Lane. Forget sending them here. Get them *there*. Quick!"

"Why? You think if it's Alister Cole, he's going for Doc Roth, too?"



His eyes centered on me and his
pistol lifted

"Don't argue. Tell 'em. Hurry!"

I was on my feet by now, trying to grope my way across the pitch black room to the telephone to join him. I stepped on a chessman and it rolled and nearly threw me. I swore and got my lighter out of my pocket and flicked the wheel.

The tiny flame lighted part of the room dimly. The faint wavering light threw long dancing shadows. On the mantel, the Siamese was standing, her back arched and her tail thick. Her blue eyes caught and held the light like blue jewels.

"Put that out, you fool," Jack snapped.

"He isn't standing there at the window," I said impatiently. "He wouldn't stay there after we doused the light. Tell them what I said about Roth's, quick."

"Hello, Cap. Listen, get some of the cars to Two-ten University Lane instead. Two-one-oh. Fast. No, I don't know what this is about either. Just do it. We can find out later. The guy who took a shot here might go there. That's all I know. So long."

He put the receiver back on the hook to end argument. I was there by that time, and had the receiver in my hand.

"Sorry, Jack," I said, and shoved him out of the way. I gave Dr. Roth's number and added, "Keep ringing till they answer."

I held the receiver tight against my ear and waited. I realized I was still holding up the tiny torch of the cigarette lighter and I snapped it shut. The room snapped again into utter darkness.

"You stay in here," Jack said. "I'm going out."

"Don't be a fool. He's got a gun."

THERE was a sharp knock on the door, and we neither of us moved until the knock came again, louder. Then we heard Professor Winton's high, nervous voice.

"Brian, was that a shot a minute ago? Are you all right?"

Jack muttered something under his breath and groped for the door handle. In the receiver against my ear I could hear Dr. Roth's phone still ringing. He hadn't answered yet. I put my hand over the mouthpiece.

"I'm all right, Dr. Winton," I called out.

By that time, Jack had found the knob and opened the door. Light streamed into the room from the hallway outside, and he stepped through the door quickly and closed it behind him.

"Someone shot through the window, Doctor," I hear him say, "but everything's under control. We've called the police. Better get back inside your room, though, till they get here."

Dr. Winton's voice said something, excitedly, but I didn't hear what, because Jeanette Roth's voice, husky and beautiful, but definitely sleepy, was saying "Hello," in my ear. I forgot Jack and Winton and concentrated my attention on the phone.

I talked fast. "This is Brian Carter, Jeanette," I said. "Listen, this is important. It's maybe life and death. Just do what I say and don't argue. First, be sure all the lights in your house are out, all doors and windows locked tight—bolted, if they've got bolts. Then don't answer the door, unless you're sure it's the police—or me. I'm coming over, too, but the police may get there first."

"Brian, what on earth—?"

"Don't argue, darling," I said. "Do those things, fast. Lights out. Everything locked. And don't answer the door unless it's me or the police!"

I hung up on her. I knew she'd do it faster that way than if I stayed on the line.

I groped my way through the dark room and out into the lighted hallway. The door to Dr. Winton's room, just across from my apartment, was closed, and there was nobody in the hallway. I ran to the front door and out onto the porch.

Out front on the sidewalk, Jack Sebastian was turning around, looking. He had something in his hand. When he turned so light from the street lamp down on the corner shone on it, I could see that it was a long-barreled pistol. I ran out to join him.

"Where'd you get that gun?" I asked him.

"From Winton. It's a target pistol, a twenty-two. But it's better than throwing stones. Look, you sap, get back in

there. You got no business out in the open."

I told him I was going to Roth's place, and started down the sidewalk at a trot.

"What's the score?" he called after me. "What makes you think it was that Cole kid, and why the excitement about Roth?"

I saved my breath by not answering him. There'd be plenty of time for all that later. I could hear him running behind me. We pounded up the steps onto the porch of Dr. Roth's place.

"It's Brian Carter—and the police!" I called out while I rang the bell.

Maybe Jack Sebastian wasn't exactly the police, in the collective sense, but he was a detective, the youngest full-fledged detective on the force. Anyway, it wasn't the time for nice distinctions. I quit leaning on the bell and hammered on the door, and then yelled again.

The key turned in the lock and I stepped back. The door opened on the chain and Jeanette's white face appeared in the crack. She wasn't taking any chances. Then, when she saw us, she slid back the chain and opened the door.

"Brian, what—" she began.

"Your father, Jeanette. Is he all right?"

"I—I knocked on his door after you phoned, Brian, and he didn't answer! The door's locked. Brian, what's wrong?"

CHAPTER II

MURDER FOR A MILLION!



UT front, a car swung into the curb with a squealing of brakes and two big men got out of it. They came running up the walk toward us and Jack stepped to the edge of the porch, where light from a street lamp would fall on his face and identify him to the two men. It also gleamed on the gun dangling from his hand.

Jeanete swayed against me and I put my arm around her shoulders. She was trembling.

"Maybe everything's okay, Jeanette," I said. "Maybe your father's just sleep-

ing soundly. Anyway, these are the police coming now, so *you're* safe."

I heard Jack talking to the two detectives who'd come in the squad car, and then one of them started around the house, on the outside, using a flashlight. Jack and the other one joined us in the doorway.

"Let's go," Jack said. "Where's your father's room, Miss Roth?"

"Just a second, Jack," I said. I snapped on the hall lights and then went into the library and turned on the lights there and looked around to be sure nobody was there.

"You wait in here, Jeanette," I said then. "We'll go up and try your father's door again, and if he still doesn't answer, we'll have to break—"

Footsteps pounded across the porch again and the other detective, the one who'd started around the house, stood in the doorway.

"There's a ladder up the side of the house to a window on the second floor—northwest corner room," he said. "Nobody around unless he's upstairs, in there. Shall I go up the ladder, Sebastian?"

Jack looked at me, and I knew that he and I were thinking the same thing. The killer had come here first, and there wasn't any hurry now.

"I'll go up the ladder," he said. "We won't have to break the door now. Will you two guys search the house from attic to cellar and turn all the lights on and leave them on? And, Brian, you stay here with Miss Roth. Can I borrow your flashlight, Wheeler?"

I noticed that, by tacit consent, Jack was taking charge of the case and of the older detectives. Because, I presumed, he was the first one on the scene and had a better idea what it was all about.

One of the men handed over a flashlight and Jack went outside. I led Jeanette into the library.

"Brian," she asked, "do you think Dad is—that something has happened to Dad?"

"We'll know for sure in a minute, darling. Why make guesses meanwhile? I don't know."

"But—what happened that made you call me up?"

"Jack and I were playing chess at my

place," I told her. "Someone took a shot through the window. At me, not at Jack. The bullet went into the wall behind me and just over my head. I—well, I had a sudden hunch you might have shot at me, and if my hunch was right, I thought he'd consider your father his enemy, too. I'm afraid he may be—mad."

"Alister Cole?"

"Have you noticed anything strange about him?" I asked her.

"Yes. He's always scared me, Brian, the way he's acted. And just last night, Dad remarked that—"

She broke off, standing there rigidly. Footsteps were coming down the stairs. That would be Jack, of course. And the fact that he walked so slowly gave us the news in advance of his coming.

Anyway, when he stood in the doorway, Jeanette asked quietly, "Is he dead?" and Jack nodded.

Jeanette sat down on the sofa behind her and dropped her head into her hands, but she didn't cry.

"I'll phone headquarters," Jack said. "But first—you and he were alone in the house tonight, weren't you, Miss Roth?"

SHE looked up and her eyes were still dry. "Yes," she said. "Mother's staying overnight with my aunt—her sister—in town. This is going to hit her hard. Will you need me here? I—I think it would be best if I were the one to break it to her. I can dress and be there in half an hour. I can be back in an hour and a half. Will it be all right?"

Jack looked at me. "What do you think, Brian? You know this guy Cole and you know what this is all about. Would Miss Roth be in any danger if she left?"

"You could figure that yourself, Jack," I said. "Cole was here, alone in the house with her after he killed Dr. Roth, and he had all the time in the world because there hadn't been an alarm yet. But let me go with her, though, just to be sure."

He snorted. "Just to be sure—of what? He is after you, my fine friend. Until we get Cole under lock and key—and throw away the key—you're not getting out from under my eye."

"All right," I said, "so I'm indispensable. But everybody isn't, and this place will be full of police in a few minutes. If I'm not mistaken, that sounds like another squad car coming now. Why not have one of the boys in it use it to drive Miss Roth over to her aunt's?"

He nodded. "Okay, Miss Roth. I'll stick my neck out—even though Headquarters may cut it off. And Wheeler and Brach have finished looking around upstairs, so it'll be okay for you to go to your room if you want to change that housecoat for a dress."

He went to the front door to let the new arrivals in.

"I'm awfully sorry, Jeanette," I said then. "I know that sounds meaningless, but—it's all I can think of to say."

She managed a faint smile. "You're a good egg, Brian. I'll be seeing you."

She held out her hand, and I took it. Then she ran up the stairs. Jack looked in at the doorway.

"I told the new arrivals to search the grounds," he said. "Not that they'll find anything, but it'll give 'em something to do. I got to phone Headquarters. You stay right here."

"Just a second, Jack," I said. "How was he killed?"

"A knife. Messy job. It was a psycho, all right."

"You say messy? Is there any chance Jeanette might go into—?"

He shook his head. "Wheeler's watching that door. He wouldn't let her go in. Well, I got to phone—"

"Listen, Jack. Tell me one thing. How long, about, has he been dead? I mean, is there any chance Cole could have come here after he shot at me? I might have thought of phoning here, or getting here a minute or two sooner. I'd feel responsible if my slowness in reacting, my dumbness—"

Jack was shaking his head. "I'm no M. E.," he said, "but Roth had been dead more than a few minutes when I found him. I'd say at least half an hour, maybe an hour."

He went to the phone and gave the Headquarters number. I heard his voice droning on, giving them the details of the murder and the attempted murder.

I sat there listening, with my eyes closed, taking in every word of it, but

carefully keeping the elation off my face.

It had gone perfectly. Everything had worked out.

Whether or not they caught Alister Cole—and they *would* catch him—nothing could go wrong now. It had come off perfectly.

I would never be suspected, and I stood to gain a million dollars—and Jeanette. . . .

SHE came down the stairs slowly, as one approaching a reluctant errand. I waited for her at the foot of the staircase, my eyes on her beautiful face. There was shock there, but—as I had expected and was glad to see—not too much grief. Roth had been a cold, austere man. Not a man to be grieved for deeply, or long.

She stopped on the second step, her eyes level with mine and only inches away. I wanted to kiss her, but this was not the time. A little while and I would, I thought.

But I could look now, and I could dream. I could imagine my hand stroking that soft blonde hair. I could imagine those soft, misty blue eyes closed and my lips kissing the lids of them, kissing that soft white throat, her yielding lips. Then—

My hand was on the newel post and she put hers over it. It almost seemed to burn.

"I wish I could go with you, darling," I said. "I wish there was something I could do to help you."

"I wish you could come with me too, Brian. But—your friend's right. And didn't you take an awful chance coming over here anyway—out in the open, with a madman out to kill you?"

"Jack was with me," I said.

Jack was calling to me from the library. "Coming," I said, and then I told Jeanette, "It's cool out, darling. Put a coat on over that thin dress."

She nodded absently. "I wish you could come with me, Brian. Mother likes you—"

I knew what she meant, what she was thinking. That things were going



Frozen with horror, I saw someone just inside the window

to be all right between us now. Her mother did like me. It was her stuffy, snobbish father who had stood in the way. Jack called again, impatiently.

"Take care of yourself, Brian," Jeanette whispered quickly. "Don't take any chances, please."

She pressed my hand, then ran past me toward the coat closet. I saw that one of the detectives was waiting for her at the door. I went into the library. Jack was still sitting at the telephone table, jotting things into a notebook. He looked very intent and businesslike.

"Captain Murdock—he's head of Homicide—is on his way here," Jack said. "He'll be in charge of the case. That's why I wanted you to let the girl get out of here first. He might insist on her staying."

"What about you?" I asked him. "Aren't you staying on the case?"

He grinned a little. "I've got my orders. They're to keep you alive until Cole is caught. The Chief told me if anything happens to you, he'll take my badge away and shove it up my ear. From now on, pal, we're Siamese twins."

"Then how about finishing that chess game?" I said. "I think I can set up the men again."

He shook his head. "Life isn't that simple. Not for a while yet, anyway. We'll have to stick here until Cap Murdock gets here, and then I'm to take you into the Chief's office. Yeah, the Chief's going down there at this time of night."

It was after one when Jack took me into Chief Randall's office. Randall, a big, slow-moving man, yawned and shook hands with me across his desk.

"Sit down, Carter," he said, and yawned again.

I took the seat across from him. Jack Sebastian sat down in a chair at the end of the desk and started doodling with the little gold knife he wears on the end of a chain.

"This Roth is a big man," Chief Randall said. "The papers are going to give us plenty if we don't settle this quick."

"Right now, Chief," Jack said, "Alister Cole is a bigger man. He's a homicidal maniac on the loose."

The Chief frowned. "We'll get him," he said. "We've got to. We've got him

on the air. We've got his description to every railroad station and airport and bus depot. We're getting out fliers with his picture—as soon as we get one. The state patrolmen are watching for him. We'll have him in hours. We're doing everything."

"That's good," I told him. "But I don't think you'll find him on his way out of town. I think he'll stay here until he gets me—or until you get him."

"He'll know that you're under protection, Brian," Jack said. "Mightn't that make a difference? Wouldn't he figure the smartest thing to do would be to blow town and hide out for a few months, then come back for another try?"

I thought it over. "He might," I said, doubtfully. "But I don't think so. You see, he isn't thinking normally. He's under paranoic compulsion, and the risks he takes aren't going to weight the balance too strongly on the safety side. He was out to kill Dr. Roth and then me. Now I'm no expert in abnormal psychology, but I think that if he'd missed on his first killing he might do as you suggested—go away and come back later when things had blown over. But he made his first kill. He stepped over the line. He's going to be under terrifically strong compulsion to finish the job right away—at any risk!"

CHAPTER III

DOUBLE BODYGUARD



ACK said, "One thing I don't get. Cole was probably standing right outside that window. We reacted quickly when that shot came, but not instantaneously. He should have had time for a second shot before we got the light out. Why didn't he take that second shot?"

"I can suggest a possibility," I told them. "I was in Alister's room about a week ago. I've been there several times. He opened a drawer to take out his chess set for our game, and I happened to notice a pistol in the drawer. He slammed the drawer quickly when he saw me glancing that way, but I asked him

about the pistol.

"He said it had been his brother's, and that he'd had it since his brother had died three years ago. He said it was a single-shot twenty-two caliber target pistol, the kind really fancy marksmen use in tournaments. I asked him if he went in for target shooting and he said no, he'd never shot it."

"Probably telling the truth about that," Chief Randall said, "since he missed your head a good six inches at—how far would it have been, Jack?"

"About twelve feet, if he'd been standing just outside the window. Farther, of course, if he'd been farther back." Jack turned to me. "Brian, how good a look did you get at the pistol? Was it a single-shot, the kind he described?"

"I think so," I said. "It wasn't either a revolver nor an automatic. It had a big fancy walnut handle, silver trimmings, and a long, slender barrel. Yes, I'd say I'm reasonably sure it was a single-shot marksman's gun. And that would be why he didn't shoot a second time before we got the light and the gas-grate turned out. I think he could have shot by the light of that gas flame even after I pulled out the plug of the floor lamp."

"It would have been maybe ten seconds, not over fifteen," Jack said, "before we got both of them out. A pistol expert, used to that type of gun, could have reloaded and shot again, but an amateur probably couldn't have. Anyway, maybe he didn't even carry extra cartridges, although I wouldn't bet on that."

"Just a second," Randall said. He picked up the phone on his desk and said, "Laboratory." A few seconds later he said, "That bullet Wheeler gave you, the one out of the wall at Brian Carter's room. Got anything on it?" He listened a minute and then said, "Okay," and hung up.

He said, "It was a twenty-two all right, a long rifle, but it was too flattened out to get any rifling marks. Say, Jack, do you know if they use long rifle cartridges in those target guns?"

"A single-shot will take any length—short, standard, or long rifle. But, Brian, why would he carry as—as in—

efficient a gun as that? Do you figure he planned this on the spur of the moment, and didn't have time to get himself a gun with bigger bullets and more of them?"

"I don't think it was on the spur of the moment," I said. "I think he must have been planning it. But he may have stuck the target gun in his pocket on the spur of the moment. I figure it this way: The knife was his weapon. He intended to kill us both with the knife. But he brought along the gun as a spare. And when he got to my place after killing Dr. Roth and found you there, Jack, instead of finding me asleep in bed, it spoiled his original idea of coming in my window and doing to me what he did to Roth. He didn't want to wait around until you left because he'd already made one kill, and maybe he remembered he'd left the ladder at the side of the house. There might be an alarm at any time."

Randall nodded. "That makes sense, Carter. Once he'd killed Roth, he was in a hurry to get you."

Jack quit doodling with his penknife and put it in his vest pocket. "Anything from the M. E.?" he asked.

RANDALL nodded. "Says the stroke across the jugular was probably the first one, and was definitely fatal. The rest of the—uh—carving was just trimming. The ladder, by the way, belonged to a painting contractor who was going to start on the house the next day. He painted the garage first—finished that today. The ladder was lying on its side against a tree in the yard, not far from where Cole used it. Cole could have seen it there from the front walk, if he'd gone by during the day or during the early evening while it was still light."

"Did the medical examiner say about when he was killed?" I asked.

"Roughly half an hour to an hour before he was found," Randall said. He sighed. "Carter, have you told us everything about Cole that you think of?"

"Everything."

"Wish I could talk you into sleeping here, under protective custody. What are your plans for the next few days?"

"Nothing very startling," I told him. "This is Friday night—Saturday morning, now. I have to teach a class Mon-

day afternoon at two. Nothing special to do until then, except some work of my own which I can do at home. As for the work I was doing with Dr. Roth, that's off for the time being. I'll have to see what the Board of Regents has to say about that."

"Then we'll worry about Monday when Monday comes," Randall said. "If, as you think, Cole is going to stay around town, we'll probably have him before then. Do you mind Sebastian staying with you?"

"Not at all."

"And I'm going to assign two men to watch the outside of your place—at least for the next forty-eight hours. We won't plan beyond that until we see what happens. Right now, every policeman in town is looking for Cole, and every state policeman is getting his description. Tomorrow's newspapers and the Sunday papers will carry his photograph, and then the whole city will be on the lookout for him. You have your gun, Sebastian?"

Jack shook his head. "Just this twenty-two I borrowed from Winton."

"You better run home and get it, and whatever clothes and stuff you'll need for a couple of days."

"I'll go with him," I said.

"You'll wait here," Jack told me. "It's only a few blocks. I'll be right back." He went out.

"While he's gone, Carter," Randall said, "I want to ask a few things he already knows, but I don't. About the set-up at the university, the exact relationship between you and Roth and between Roth and Alister Cole, what kind of work you do—things like that."

"Dr. Roth was head of the Department of Psychology," I said. "It's not a big department, here at Hudson U. He had only two full professors under him. Winton, who stays where I do, is one of them. Dr. Winton specializes in social psychology."

"Then there are two instructors. I'm one of them. An instructor is somewhere between a student and a professor. He's taking post-graduate courses leading to further degrees which will qualify him to be a professor. In my own case, I'm within weeks of getting my master's. After that, I start working

for a doctorate. Meanwhile, I work my way by teaching and by helping in the research lab, grading papers, monitoring exams—well, you get the idea.

"Alister Cole was—I suppose we can consider him fired now—a lab assistant. That isn't a job that leads to anything. It's just a job doing physical work. I don't think Cole had even completed high school."

"What sort of work did he do?"

"Any physical work around the laboratory. Feeding the menagerie—we work with rats and white mice mostly, but there are also Rhesus monkeys and guinea pigs—cleaning cages, sweeping—"

"Doesn't the university have regular cleaning women?"

"Yes, but not in the lab. With experiments going on there, we don't want people who don't know the apparatus working around it, possibly moving things that shouldn't be moved. The lab assistants know what can be touched and what can't."

"Then, in a way, Dr. Roth was over both of you?"

"More than in a way. He didn't exactly hire us—the Board of Regents does all the hiring—but we both worked under him. In different capacities, of course."

"I understand that," Randall said. "Then you could say Dr. Roth's job was something like mine, head of a department. Your relationship to him would be about that of your friend, Sebastian, to me, and Alister Cole would be—umm—a mess attendant over on the jail side, or maybe a turnkey."

"That's a reasonably good comparison," I agreed. "Of course I was the only instructor who worked directly under Dr. Roth, so I was a lot closer to him than Jack would be to you. You have quite a few detectives under you, I'd guess."

He sighed. "Never quite enough, when anything important happens."

There was a knock on the door and he called out, "Yeah?"

THE detective named Wheeler stuck his head in. "Miss Roth's here," he announced. "You said you wanted to talk to her. Shall I send her in?"

Chief Randall nodded, and I stood up. "You might as well stay, Carter," he told me.

Jeanette came in. I held the chair I'd been sitting in for her, and moved around to the one Jack had vacated. Wheeler had stayed outside, so I introduced Jeanette and Randall.

"I don't want to keep you long, Miss Roth," Randall said, "so I'll get right down to the few questions I want to ask. When did you see Alister Cole last?"

"This afternoon, around three o'clock."

"At your house?"

"Yes. He came then and asked if Dad was home. I told him Dad was downtown, but that I expected him any minute. I asked him to come in and wait."

"Did he and you talk about anything?"

"Nothing much. As it happened, I'd been drinking some coffee, and I gave him a cup of it. But we talked only a few minutes—not over ten—before Dad came home."

"Do you know what he wanted to see your father about?"

"No. Dad took him into the library and I went out to the kitchen. Mr. Cole stayed only a few minutes, and then I heard him leaving."

"Did it sound as though he and your father were quarreling? Did you hear their voices?"

"No, I didn't hear. And Dad didn't say, afterwards, what Mr. Cole had wanted to see him about. But he did say something about Mr. Cole. He said he wondered if the boy was—how did he put it?—if he was all right. Said he wondered if maybe there wasn't a tendency toward schizophrenia, and that he was going to keep an eye on him for a while."

"Had you noticed anything strange about Cole's actions or manner when you talked to him before he saw your father?"

"He seemed a little excited about something and—well, trying to hide his excitement. And then there's one thing I'd always noticed about him—that he was unusually reticent and secretive about himself. He never volunteered any information about his—about any-

thing concerning himself. He could talk all right about other things."

"Do you know if Cole knew your mother would not be there tonight?"

"I don't believe—Wait. Yes, he did. I forget just how it came into the conversation when I was talking with Mr. Cole, but I did mention my aunt's being sick. He'd met her. And I think I said Mother was staying with her a few nights."

"Was anything said about the ladder in your yard?"

"He asked if we were having the house painted, so I imagine he saw it lying there. It wasn't mentioned specifically."

"And tonight—what time did you last see your father?"

"When he said good-night at about ten o'clock and went up to bed. I finished a book I was reading and went upstairs about an hour later. I must have gone right to sleep because it seemed as though I'd been asleep a long time when I heard the phone ringing and went to answer it."

"You heard nothing until—I mean, you heard nothing from the time your father went to sleep at ten until you were wakened by the phone—which would have been at a quarter to eleven?"

"Not a sound."

"Did your father usually lock the door of his room?"

"Never. There was a bolt on the door, but he'd never used it that I know of."

CHIEF Randall nodded. "Then Cole must have bolted the door before he went back down the ladder," he said. "Is there anything you can add, Miss Roth?"

Jeanette hesitated. "No," she said. "Nothing that I can think of." She turned and smiled, faintly, at me. "Except that I want you to take good care of Brian."

"We'll do that," Randall told her. He raised his voice, "Wheeler!" The big detective opened the door and Randall said, "Take Miss Roth home now. Then take up duty at Forty-five University Lane—that's where Carter here lives. Outside. Jack Sebastian'll be inside with him. If the two of you let anything happen to him—God help you!"

CHAPTER IV

A WINDOW IS OPENED



PULLING the car to the curb half a block from my place. Jack said, "That looks like Wheeler in a car up ahead, but I'm not taking any chances. Wait here."

He got out and walked briskly to the car ahead. I noticed that he walked with his hand in his right coat pocket. He leaned into the car and talked a moment, then came back.

"It's Wheeler," he said, "and he's got a good spot there. He can watch both windows of your room, and he has a good view of the whole front of the place besides."

"How about the back?" I asked him.

"There's a bolt on the back door. Cole would have trouble getting in that way. Besides, we'll both be in your place and your door will be locked. If he could get into the house, he's got two more hurdles to take—your door and me."

"And don't forget me."

"That's the hurdle he wants to take. Come on. I'll leave you with Wheeler while I case the joint inside before I take you in."

We walked up to Wheeler's car and I got in beside him. "Besides looking around in my place," I told Jack, "you might take a look in the basement. If he got in while we were gone, and is hiding out anywhere but in my place, it would be there. Probably up at the front end."

"I'll check it. But why would he be there?"

"He knows that part of the place. Mr. Chandler, the owner, turned over the front section of the basement to me for some experiments that Dr. Roth and I were doing on our own time. We were working with rats down there—an extension of some experiments we started at the university lab, but wanted to keep separate. So Alister Cole's been down there."

"And if he wanted to lay for you someplace, that might be it?"

"It's possible. He'd figure I'd be coming down there sooner or later."

"Okay, but I'll get you into your apartment first, then go down there."

He went inside and I saw the lights in my place go on. Five minutes later he came out to the car. "Clean as a whistle," he said. "Wait till I get my stuff from my own car and we'll go in."

He went to his own car half a block back and returned with a suitcase. We went into the house and into my place.

"You're safe here," he said. "Lock me out now, and when I come back, don't let me in until you hear and recognize my voice."

"How about a complicated knock? Three shorts and a long."

He looked at me and saw I was grinning. He shook his finger at me. "Listen, pal," he said, "this is dead serious. There's a madman out to kill you, and he might be cleverer than you think. You can't take anything for granted until he's caught."

"I'll be good," I told him.

"I've got more at stake on this than you have," he said, "because if he kills you, you're only dead. But me, I'll be out of a job. Now let's hear that door lock when I go out in the hall."

I locked it after him, and started to pick up the chessmen from the floor. The Siamese blinked at me from her perch on the mantel. I tickled her under the chin.

"Hi, Beautiful," I said. "How'd you like all the excitement?"

She closed her eyes, as all cats do when they're having their chins chucked, and didn't answer me.

I leaned closer and whispered, "Cheer up, Beautiful. We're in the money, almost. You can have a silken cushion and only the best grades of calves' liver."

I finished picking up the chessmen and went over to the window. Looking out diagonally to the front, I could see the car that Wheeler was sitting in. I made a motion with my hand, and got an answering motion from the car.

I pulled down the shades in both rooms and was examining them to make sure that one couldn't see in from the outside when there was a tap at the door. I walked over and let Jack back in after he'd spoken to me.

"Nothing down there but some guinea

pig cages and what look like mazes. The cages are all empty."

"They're rat cages," I told him. "And the things that look like mazes, strangely enough, are mazes. That's a sizable suitcase you brought. Planning to move in on me?"

He sat down in my most comfortable chair. "Only suitcase I had. It isn't very full. I brought an extra suit, by the way, but it's not for me. It's for Alistair Cole."

"Huh? A suit for—"

"Strait jacket. Picked it up at Headquarters, just in case. Listen, pal, you got any idea what it means to take a maniac? We'll take him alive, if we can, but we'll have to crease him or sap him, and I'll want some way of holding him down after he comes to." He shuddered a little. "I handled one of them once. Rather, I helped handle one. It took four of us, and the other three guys were huskier than I am. And it wasn't any picnic."

"You're making me very happy," I told him. "Did you by any chance pick up an extra gun for me?"

"Can you shoot one? Ever handled one?"

I said, "You pull the trigger, don't you?"

"That's what I mean. That's why I didn't get you one. Look, if this loonie isn't caught, and he makes a clean getaway, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll get you a permit for a gun, help you pick one out, and take you down to the police range and teach you how to use it. Because I won't be able to stay with you forever."

"Fine," I said. "I'd feel happier with one right away, though."

"Brian, people who don't know guns, who aren't expert with them, are better off without them. Safer. I'll bet if Alistair Cole hadn't had a gun tonight, he'd have got you."

"How do you figure that?"

"Simple. He looked in the window and saw me playing chess with you. If he'd had only the shiv, he'd have hidden somewhere until after I'd left and given you time to get to sleep. Then he'd have come in your window—and that would have been that. But since he had a gun, he took a chance with it. Not knowing how to squeeze a trigger without moving his sights, he overshoots. And, I hope, ends his chances of getting you."

I nodded, slowly. "You've got a point," I admitted. "All right, I'll wait and learn it right, if you don't get Alistair. Want to finish that game of chess?" I glanced toward Beautiful, now sound asleep, but still perched where she could overlook the game. "I promise you that Beautiful won't kibitz."

"Too late," Jack said. "It's after three. How long have you had that cat, Brian?"

"You should remember. You were with me when I bought her. Four years ago, wasn't it? Funny how a pet gets to mean so much to you. I wouldn't sell her for anything on earth."

Jack wrinkled his nose. "A dog, now, I could understand. They're some company to a guy."

Moving my hand in a deprecating gesture, I laughed at him. "That's

[Turn page]

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because you're not used to such intelligent and aesthetic company. Next to women, cats are the most beautiful things on earth, and we rate women higher only because we're prejudiced. Besides, women talk back and cats don't. I'd have gone nuts the last few months if I hadn't had Beautiful to talk to. I've been working twelve to fourteen hours a day, and—that reminds me. I'd better get some sleep. How about you?"

"Not sleepy yet, but don't let me stop you. I'll go in the other room and read. What have you got that might give me some dope on Alister Cole. Got any good books on abnormal psychology?"

"Not a lot. That's out of our line here. We don't have courses in the abnormal brand. We work with fundamentals, mostly. Oh, I've got a couple of general books. Try that *Outline of Abnormal Psychology* on the top shelf, the blue jacket. It's pretty elementary, I guess, but it's as far as you'll cover in a few hours reading anyway."

I started undressing while Jack got the book and skimmed the table of contents. "This looks okay," he said. "Chapters on dementia praecox, paranoia, waking hypnosis—Never heard of that. Is it common?"

"Certainly," I told him. "We've tried it. It's not really part of abnormal psychology at all, although it can be used in treatment of mental troubles. We've subjected whole classes—with their consent, of course—to experiments in automatic writing while under suggestion in waking state amnesia. That's what I used for my senior thesis for my B. A. If you want to read up on what's probably wrong with Alister Cole, read the chapter on paranoia and paranoid conditions, and maybe the chapter on schizophrenia—that's dementia praecox. I'd bet on straight paranoia in Cole's case, but it could be schiz."

I hung my clothes over the chair and started to pull on my pajamas.

"According to Jeanette," Jack said, "Dr. Roth thought Cole might have a touch of schizophrenia. But you bet on paranoia. What's the difference?"

I sighed. "All right, I'll tell you. Paranoia is the more uncommon of the two disorders, and it's harder to spot. Especially if a subject is tied up in knots

and won't talk about himself. A man suffering from paranoia builds up an air-tight system of reasoning about some false belief or peculiar set of ideas. He sticks to these delusions, and you can't convince him he's wrong in what he thinks. But if his particular delusion doesn't show, you can't spot him, because otherwise he seems normal.

"A schizophrenic, on the other hand, may have paranoid ideas, but they're poorly systematized, and he's likely to show other symptoms that he's off-balance. He may have ideas that other people are always talking about him, or trying to do him harm, and he's subjected to incoherence, rambling, untidiness, apathy—all sorts of symptoms. Cole didn't show any of them."

"A paranoiac, then, could pretty well hide what was wrong with him," Jack said, "as long as no one spotted the particular subject he was hipped on?"

"Some of them do. Though if we'd been specialists, I think we'd have spotted Cole quickly. But listen. Hadn't you better get some sleep too?"

"Go ahead and pound your ear. I'll take a nap if I get tired. Here goes the light."

He turned it out and went into the next room. He left the door ajar, but I found that if I turned over and faced the wall, the little light that came in didn't bother me.

Beautiful, the cat, jumped down from the mantel and came over to sleep on my feet, as she always does. I reached down and petted her soft warm fur a moment, then I lay back on the pillow and quit thinking. I slept.

A sound walked me—the sound of a window opening slowly.

CHAPTER V

DEATH—TO RATS



WITH me, as with most people, dreams are forgotten within the first few seconds after waking. I remember the one I was just having, though, because of the tie-up it had with the sound that awakened me.

My dream had changed that slow up-

ward scrape of the window into the scrape of claws on cement, the cement of the basement. There in the little front room of the basement, Dr. Roth was standing with his hand on the latch of a rat cage, and a monstrous cat with the markings of a Siamese was scraping her claws on the floor, gathering her feet under her to spring. It was Beautiful, my cat, and yet it wasn't. She was almost as large as a lion. Her eyes glowed like the headlights of a car.

Dr. Roth cowered back against the tier of rat cages, holding a hand in front of him to ward off the attack. I watched from the doorway, and I tried to open my mouth to scream at her to stop, not to jump. But I seemed paralyzed. I couldn't move a muscle or make a sound.

I SAW the cat's tail grow larger. Her eyes seemed to shoot blue sparks. And then she leaped.

Dr. Roth's arm was knocked aside as though it had been a toothpick. Her claws sank into his shoulders and her white, sharp teeth found his throat. He screamed once, and then the scream became a gurgle and he lay on the cement floor, dead, in a puddle of his blood. And the cat, backing away from him, was shrinking to her real size, getting smaller, her claws still scraping the cement as she backed away. . . .

And then, still frozen with the horror of that dream, I began to know that I was dreaming, that the sound I heard was the opening of a window.

I sat up in bed, fast. I opened my mouth to yell for Jack. Someone stood there, just inside the window!

And then, before I had yelled, I saw that it was Jack who stood there. Enough light came in from the other room that I could be sure of that. He'd raised the shade. He was crouched down now, and his eyes, level with the middle of the lower pane, stared through it into the night outside.

He must have heard the springs creak as I sat up. He turned. "Shhh," he said. "It's all right—I think."

He put the window back down again then, and threw over the lock. He pulled down the shade and came over to the bed and sat down in a chair beside it.

"Sorry I woke you," he said, very

quietly. "Can you go back to sleep, or do you want to talk a while?"

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Three-forty. You were asleep only half an hour. I'm sorry, but—"

"But what? What's been happening? Did you think you heard a sound outside?"

"Not outside the window, no. But a few minutes ago I thought I heard someone try the knob of the hall door. But when I got there and listened, I couldn't hear anything."

"It could have been Alister Cole," I said, "if he got in the back way. Wheeler isn't watching the back door."

"That's what I thought, even though I didn't hear anything back there. So I went to the window. I thought if I could attract Wheeler's attention, he'd come in the front way. Then I'd take a chance opening the hall door—with my gun ready, of course. If Cole was there, we'd have him between us."

"Did you get Wheeler's attention?"

He shook his head slowly. "His car isn't where it was. You can't even see it from the window. Maybe he moved it to a different spot where he thought he'd be less conspicuous, or could watch better."

"That's probably it. Well, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing. Sit tight. If I stick my neck out into that hall, or go outside through the window, the edge is going to be with Cole. If I sit here and make him come to me, it's the other way round. Only I'm through reading for tonight. I'm sitting right here by the bed. If you can sleep, go ahead. I'll shut up and let you."

"Sure," I said. "I can sleep swell. Just like a lamb staked out in the jungle to draw a tiger for the hunters. That's how I can sleep."

He chuckled. "The lamb doesn't know what it's there for."

"Until it smells tiger. I smell tiger." That reminded me of my dream, and I told him about it.

"You're a psychologist," he said. "What does it mean?"

"Probably that I had a subconscious dislike for Dr. Roth," I told him. "Only I know that already. I don't need to interpret a dream to tell me that."

"What did you have against Roth, Brian? I've known there was something from the way you've talked about him."

"He was a prig, for one thing," I said. "You know me well enough, Jack, to know I'm not too bad a guy, but he thought I was miles away from being good enough for Jeanette. Well—maybe I am, but then again, so's everybody else who might fall in love with her."

"Does she love you?"

"I think so." I thought it over. "Sure, I practically know she does, from things she said tonight."

"Anything else? I mean, about Roth. Is that the only reason you didn't like him?"

I DIDN'T say anything for a while. I was thinking. I thought, why not tell Jack now? Sooner or later, he'll know it. The whole world will know it. Why not get it off my chest right now, while there was a good chance to get my side of it straight?

Something made me stop and listen first. There wasn't a sound from outside nor from the hallway.

"Jack," I said, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm awfully glad that you were here tonight."

"Thanks, pal." He chuckled a little.

"I don't mean what you think I mean, Jack. Sure, maybe you saved my life from Alister Cole. But more than that, you gave me an alibi."

"An alibi? For killing Roth? Sure, I was with you when he was killed."

"Exactly. Listen, Jack, I had a reason for killing Roth. That reason's coming out later anyway. I might as well tell you now."

He turned and stared at me. There was enough light in the room so that I could see the movement of his head, but, not enough so that he could watch my face. I don't know why he bothered turning.

"If you need an alibi," he said, "you've sure got one. We started playing chess at somewhere around eight. You haven't been out of my sight since then, except while you were in Chief Randall's office."

"Don't think I don't know that," I told him. "And don't think I'm not happy about it. Listen, Jack. Because Roth

is dead, I'm going to be a millionaire. If he was alive, I still might be, but there'd have been a legal fight about it. I would have been right, but I could have lost just the same."

"You mean it would have been a case of your word against his?"

"Exactly. And he's—he was—department head, and I'm only a flunky, a little better on his social scale than Alister Cole. And it's something big, Jack. Really big."

"What?"

"What kind of rat cages did you find in the basement when you looked down there?" I asked him.

"What kind? I don't get you. I don't know makes of rat cages."

"Don't worry about the make," I said. "You found only one kind. Empty ones. The rats were dead. And disposed of."

He turned to look at me again. "Go on," he said.

Now that I'd started to tell him, I knew I wouldn't even try to go back to sleep. I was too excited. I propped the pillow up against the head of the bed.

"Make a guess, Jack," I said. "How much food do rats eat a year in the United States alone?"

"I wouldn't know. A million dollars' worth?"

"A hundred million dollars' worth," I said, "at a conservative estimate. Probably more than a million dollars is spent fighting them, each year. In the world, their cost is probably a billion dollars a year. Not altogether—just for one year! How much do you think something would be worth that would actually completely eliminate rats—both *Mus Rattus* and *Mus Norvegicus*—completely and for once and all? Something that would put them with the hairy mammoth and the roc and the dinosaurs?"

"If your mathematics are okay," Jack said, "it'd be worth ten billion bucks in the first ten years?"

"Ten billion, on paper. A guy who could do it ought to be able to get one ten-thousandth that much, shouldn't he? A million?"

"Seems reasonable. And somebody ought to throw in a Nobel prize along with it. But can you do it?"

"I can do it," I said. "Right here in

my basement I stumbled across it, accidentally, Jack, in the course of another experiment. But it works. It works! It kills rats!"

"So does Red Squill. So does strychnine. What's your stuff got that they haven't?"

"Communicability. Give it to *one* rat—and the whole colony dies! Like all the rats—thirty of them, to be exact—died when I injected one rat. Sure, you've got to catch one rat alive—but that's easy. Then just inject it and let it go, and all the rats in the neighborhood die."

"A bacillus?"

"No. Look, I'll be honest with you. I don't know exactly how it works, but it's not a germ. I have a hunch that it destroys a rat's immunity to some germ he carries around with him normally—just as you and I carry around a few billion germs which don't harm us ordinarily because we also carry around the antibodies that keep them in check. But this injection probably destroys certain antibodies in the rat and the germs become—unchecked. The germs also become strong enough to overcome the antibodies in other rats, and they must be carried by the air because they spread from cage to cage with no direct contact. Thirty rats died within twenty-four hours after I innoculated the first one—some in cages as far away as six feet."

JACK SEBASTIAN whistled. "Maybe you have got something," he said softly. "Where did Roth come in on it, though? Did he claim half, or what?"

"Half I wouldn't have minded giving him," I said. "But he insisted the whole thing belonged to the university, just because I was working on an experiment for the university—even though it was in my own place, on my own time. And the thing I hit upon was entirely outside the field of the experiment. I don't see that at all. Fortunately, he didn't bring it to an issue. He said we should experiment further before we announced it."

"Do you agree with that?"

"Of course. Naturally, I'm not going off half-cocked. I'm going to be sure, plenty sure, before I announce it. But when I do, it's going to be after the thing

has been patented in my name. I'm going to have that million bucks, Jack!"

"I hope you're right," he said. "And I can't say I blame you, if you made the discovery here at your own place on your own time. Anyone else know about it?"

"No."

"Did Alister Cole?"

"No, he didn't. I think, Jack, that this thing is bigger even than you realize. Do you know how many human lives it's going to save? We don't have any bubonic here in this country—or much of any other rat-and-flea borne disease, but take the world as a whole."

"I see what you mean. Well, more power to you, keed. And if everything goes well, take me for a ride on your yacht sometime."

"You think I'm kidding?"

"Not at all. And I pretty well see what you mean by being glad you've got an alibi. Well, it's a solid one, if my word goes for anything. To have killed Dr. Roth—no matter how much motive you may have had—you'd have had to have had a knife on a pole a block and a half long. Besides—"

"What?"

"Nothing. Listen, I'm worried about Wheeler. Probably he moved that car to another spot, but I wish I knew for sure."

"It's a squad car, isn't it?" I asked.

"Yes."

"With two-way radio?"

"Yes, but I haven't got a radio in here."

"We got a telephone. If you're worried about Wheeler—and you're getting me that way too—why don't you phone Headquarters and have them call Wheeler and phone you back?"

"Either you're a genius or I'm a dope," he said. "Don't tell me which."

He got up out of the chair and I could see he was still holding the gun in his hand. He went first to the door and listened carefully, then he went to the window. He listened carefully there. Finally, he pulled back the shade a crack to look out.

"Now you're giving me the willies, and I might as well get up," I said. "For some reason, I'd rather get killed with my pants on—if I'm going to get killed." I looked at my cat. "Sorry, Beautiful,"

I said as I pulled my feet out from under the Siamese.

I took off my pajamas and started putting on my shirt and trousers.

"Wheeler's car still isn't anywhere I can see," Jack said.

He went over to the telephone and lifted the receiver off the hook. I slipped my feet into a pair of loafers and looked over. He was still holding the receiver and hadn't spoken. He put it back gently. "Someone's cut the wires," he said. "The line is dead."

CHAPTER VI

THE CAT



SAID, "I don't believe this. It's out of a horror program on the radio. It's a gag."

Jack snorted. He was turning around, looking from the window to the door. "Got a flashlight?"

"Yes. In the drawer over there."

"Get it," he said. "Then sit back in that corner where you're not in direct range from the window or the door. If either opens, bracket it with your flash. I've got my flash but I'm using it left-handed. Anyway, two spots are better than one, and I want to see to shoot straight."

While I was getting the flashlight, he closed the door to the other room, leaving us in pitch darkness except for our flashes. I lighted my own way to the chair he'd pointed out.

"There's a window in that other room," I said. "Is it locked?"

"Yes," he answered. "He can't get in there without breaking that window. Okay, turn out that light and sit tight."

I heard him move across the room to another corner. His flashlight played briefly first on the door to the hallway, then swept across to the window. Then it went out.

"Wouldn't the advantage be with us if we kept the light on?" I asked.

"No. Listen, if he busts in the window, when you aim your flash at it, hold it out from your body, out over the arm of your chair. So if he shoots at the flash, he won't hit you. Our two lights

should blind him. We should be able to see him, but he shouldn't be able to see us."

"Okay," I said.

I don't know how many minutes went by. Then there was a soft tapping at the window. I tensed in my chair and aimed the flashlight at the window without turning it on.

The tapping came again. An irregular series: *tap—tap—tap—tap*.

"That's Wheeler," Jack whispered. "It's the code tap. Cole couldn't possibly know it. Sit tight."

I could hear him moving across the room in the darkness. I could see a streak of grayness as he cautiously lifted one side of the shade, then peered through the crack between shade and window. As quietly as he could, he ran up the shade and unlocked and raised the window.

It was turning slightly gray outside, and a little light came from the street lamp a quarter of a block away. I could recognize the big body of Wheeler coming through the window. Wheeler, and not Alister Cole.

I began breathing again. I got up out of the chair and went over to them. Wheeler was whispering.

"... So don't put down the windows," he was saying. "I'll come in that way again."

"I'll leave it up to Brian," Jack whispered back. "If he wants to take that chance. Meanwhile, you watch that window."

He pulled me to one side then, away from the open window. "Listen," he said. "Wheeler saw somebody moving in back. He'd moved his car where he could watch part of the back yard. He got there in time to see a window going down. Alister Cole's inside the building. Wheeler's got an idea now, only it's got a risk to it. I'll leave it up to you. If you don't like it, he'll go out again and get help, and we'll sit tight here, as we were until help comes."

"What's the idea?" I asked. If it wasn't too risky, I'd like it better than another vigil while Wheeler went for help.

"Wheeler," Jack said, "thinks he should walk right out of the door into the hall and out the front door. He

thinks Cole will hear that, and will think I'm leaving you. Wheeler will circle around the house and come in the window again. Cole should figure you're here alone and come in that hallway door—and both Wheeler and I will be here to take him. You won't be taking any risk unless by some chance he gets both of us. That isn't likely. We're two to one, and we'll be ready for him."

I whispered back that it sounded good to me. He gripped my arm.

"Go back to your chair then. That's as good a place as any."

GROPING my way back to the chair, I heard Jack and Wheeler whispering as they went toward the hallway door. They were leaving the window open and, since it was momentarily unguarded, I kept my eyes on it, ready to yell a warning if a figure appeared there. But none did.

The hallway door opened and closed quickly, letting a momentary shaft of light into the room. I heard Jack back away from the door and Wheeler's footsteps going along the hallway. I heard the front door open and close, Wheeler's steps cross the porch.

A moment later, there was the soft *tap—tap—tap—tap* on the upper pane of the open window, and then Wheeler's bulk came through it.

Very, very quietly, he closed the window and locked it. He pulled down the shade. Then I heard the shuffle of his footsteps as he moved into position to the right of the door.

I haven't any idea how long we waited after that. Probably five or ten minutes—but it seemed like hours. Then I heard, or thought I heard, the very faintest imaginable sound. It might have been the scrape of shoes on the carpet of the hall outside the door. But there wasn't any doubt about the next sound. It was the soft turning of the knob of the door. It turned and held. The door pushed open a crack, then a few inches. Light streamed over a slowly widening area.

Then one thing Jack hadn't counted on happened. A hand reached in, between the door and the jamb, and flicked on the light switch. Dazzling light from the bulks in the ceiling almost blinded

me. And it was in that blinding second that the door swung back wide and Alister Cole, knife in one hand and single-shot target pistol in the other, stood in the doorway. His eyes flashed around the room, taking in all three of us. But then his eyes centered on me and the target pistol lifted.

Jack stepped in from the side and a blackjack was in his upraised hand. It swung down and there was a sound like someone makes thumping a melon. He and Wheeler caught Alister Cole, one from each side, and eased his way down to the carpet.

Wheeler bent over him and got the gun and the knife first, then held his hand over Cole's head.

"He'll be all right," he said.

He took a pair of handcuffs from his hip pocket, rolled Cole over and cuffed his hands together behind him. Then he straightened, picking up the gun he'd put down on the carpet while he worked on Cole.

I'd stood up, my knees still shaking a little. My forehead felt as though it was beaded with cold sweat. The flashlight was gripped so tightly in my right hand that my fingers ached.

I caught sight of Beautiful, again on the mantel, and she was standing up, her tail bushy and straight up, her fur back of the ears and along the back standing up in a ridge, her blue eyes blazing. "It's all right, Beautiful," I said to her soothingly. "All the excitement's over, and everything's—"

I was walking toward the mantel, raising my hand to pet her, when Wheeler's excited voice stopped me.

"Watch out," he yelled. "That cat's going to jump—"

And I saw the muzzle of his gun raising and pointing at the Siamese cat.

My right hand swung up with the flashlight and I leaped at Wheeler. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Jack stepping in as Wheeler ducked back. The corner of my eye caught the swing of his blackjack. . . .

THE overhead light was bright in my eyes when I opened them. I was lying flat on the bed and the first thing I saw was Beautiful, curled up on my chest looking at me. She was all right

now, her fur sleek and her curled tail back to normal. Whatever else had happened, she was all right.

I turned my head, and it hurt to turn it, but I saw that Jack was sitting beside the bed. The door was closed and Wheeler and Cole were gone.

"What happened?" I asked.

"You tried to kill Wheeler," Jack said. There was something peculiar about his voice, but his eyes met mine levelly.

"Don't be silly," I said. "I was going to knock his arm down before he could shoot. He was crazy. He must have a phobia against cats."

Jack shook his head. "You were going to kill him," he said. "You were going to kill him whether he shot or not."

"Don't be silly," I tried to move my hands and found they were fastened behind me. I looked at Jack angrily. "What's wrong with you?"

"Not with me, Brian," he said. "With you. I know—now—that it was really you who killed Dr. Roth tonight. Yes, I know you've got an alibi. But you did it just the same. You used Alister Cole as your instrument. My guess would be waking hypnosis."

"I suppose I got him to try to kill me, too!" I said.

"You told him he'd shoot *over your head*, and then run away. It was a compulsion so strong he tried it again tonight, even after he saw Wheeler and me ready to slug him if he tried. And he was aiming high again. How long have you been working on him?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You do, Brian. You don't know it all, but you know this part of it. You found out that Cole had schizophrenic tendencies. You found out, probably while playing chess with him, that you could put him under waking hypnosis without his knowing it. And you worked on him. What kind of a fantasy did you build in him? What kind of a conspiracy, did you plant in his mind, Dr. Roth was leading against him?"

"You're crazy."

"No, *you* are, Brian. Crazy, but clever. And you know that what I've just told you just now is right. You also know I'll never be able to prove it. I admit that. But there's something else you

don't know. I don't have to prove it."

For the first time I felt a touch of fear.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"You gave Cole his fantasies, but you don't know your own. You don't know that—under the pressure, possibly, of working too hard and studying too hard—your own mind cracked. You don't know that your million-dollar rat killer is *your* fantasy. You don't believe me, now that I'm telling you that it is a fantasy. You'll never believe it. The paranoiac builds up an air-tight system of excuses and rationalization to support his insane delusions. You'll never believe me."

I TRIED to sit up and couldn't. I realized then that it wasn't a matter of my arms being tied. Jack had put the strait jacket on me. "You're part of it, then," I said. "You're one of those in the plot against me."

"Sure, sure. You know, Brian. I can guess what started it. Or rather what set it off, probably only a few days ago. It was when Dr. Roth killed your cat. That dream you told me about tonight—the cat killing Dr. Roth. Your mind wouldn't accept the truth. Even your subconscious mind reversed the facts for the dream. I wonder what really happened. Possibly your cat killed a rat that was an important part of an experiment and, in anger, Dr. Roth—"

"You're crazy," I shouted. "Crazy!"

"And ever since, Brian, you've been talking to a cat that wasn't there. I thought you were kidding, at first. When I figured out the truth, I told Wheeler what I figured. When you gave us a clue where the cat was supposed to be, on the mantel, he raised his gun and pretended—"

"Jack!" I begged him, to break off the silly things he was saying. "If you're going to help them railroad me, even if you're in on the plot—please get them to let me take Beautiful with me. Don't take her away too. Please!"

Cars were driving up outside. I could feel the comforting weight and warmth of the cat sleeping on my chest.

"Don't worry, Brian," Jack said quietly. "That cat'll go wherever you go. Nobody can take it away from you. Nobody."

Of Rats
and
Heels

"Tell me where you're
meeting Sam Chu"

By
DONN
MULLALLY

By
DONN
MULLALLY

By nine-thirty-and-a-half, the galley secured, my shoreside burlap bent on, I was strictly a passenger. I had plans involving a certain large and friendly

"Hi, Dooley," he said. "Goin' ashore?"
-He thought that was funny. At least he laughed. I about half-intended he

Dooley might be a heel, but the rat he was after didn't care to get stepped on—or to be trapped!

should. Sam's a pretty fine little fellow, even if he does cut into my poker winnings. He knows his way around a galley. The only trouble he ever makes for me is when he has his fist full of those ever-lovin' pasteboards. Ordinarily, he's about as mysterious and Oriental as apple pie. But let him start to fill out a flush or throw a bluff with a Jack and a pair showing.

Then, believe me, he's the original inscrutable Chinese.

I didn't have anything else to say to him right then, so I started ribbing about the dough, he'd taken from me that trip.

"What d'ya do with all that loot, Sam?" I grinned. "Maybe I'd feel better if I thought I was losing my bundle to a good cause."

He stopped smiling. His round, brown face dummed up and he gave me a long, slant-eyed look. I knew how it'd feel to be Buddah's navel.

"Sorry, Sam," I squirmed, "forget I said it. I was just trying to get off a gag. What you do is no business of mine."

"No, Dooley," said Chu, his face mostly teeth again. "Don't apologize."

FRANKLY, I was embarrassed. I wagged my head absently, trying to seem interested in the narrow strip of greasy water between the ship and the dock. Lines were aboard now.

"Okay—if you say so, Sam," I hedged, hoping that was the end of it.

It wasn't. Instead, he nudged me with an elbow.

"I—ah—I'd sort of figured—"

"She can wait, can't she?" chuckled Sam. "On the level, I'd like to show you where your money's going."

"Maybe *she* can wait," I winked. "I'm not so sure about Dooley. How's for a raincheck?"

He looked defeated, but only for a second. "Okay," he smiled, "but don't be too long about taking it up. My father is a very old man. In his seventies. He's nearly blind with cataracts, crippled by arthritis—"

I cleared my throat. This was getting sticky. We were alongside the dock now, lines doubled up. A crane rumbled toward us, dangling a gangway.

"That's tough, Sam," I said. "Long as I had to lose the dough, I'm glad it was to you—if it'll make it any easier for him."

"It's doing more than that," Chu assured me. "You're buying him a trip back to China—about the biggest thing the old gentleman asks of life. A chance to die in his home village and be buried with his ancestors." He flashed another eager grin. "That's what you're contributing to, Dooley—the going home fund. I thought you might like to be there when I tell him he can start to pack."

I edged toward the gangway, at the same time trying to boom up a regretful alibi.

"I would, Sam," I said, "but you can see what it is with me. I've got this date. And besides, Sam, I think your Dad'd rather you were alone when you told him. Do you know what I mean?"

The little moon-face bobbed up and down solemnly, disappointed. "Yeah, Dooley. I understand."

The trouble was, I knew he did. And for some reason I couldn't label—I felt like the big, phony heel I guess I was.

What happened afterwards, when I arrived at my blonde friend's apartment, didn't make me all sweetness and light either. There was no answer to my ring. I finally raised her landlady and found out my gal had gone to L. A.—to nurse a sick friend. Annie'd never know it, but she had a small epidemic right here at home.

I made a couple of mild telephone passes at some other babes—but no dice. Everybody was booked—except Dooley. I began to think that moon-faced Sam Chu had put a Chinese hex on me.

My only out seemed to be to freelance around the bars. But even that wasn't as good as it used to be. Most of the joints were from famine—no customers, just bartenders. Too bad they weren't what I had in mind.

Maybe I didn't kill the day that way, but I sure paralyzed it. And me. I even forgot what I was prospecting for, where I was, and Sam Chu. I curled up quietly in the corner of a booth, put my head down on my arms like a good little lush, and went to sleep.

The next thing I knew someone was

shaking me, I could hear a soft, female voice.

"Mr. Dooley—Mr. Dooley, please wake up."

"Sure, honey—anything you say."

I ran a jack under my chin, lifted it and opened my big blue eyes. They were probably red around the edges, but this didn't scare the girl across the table from me.

"Mr. Dooley—I thought I'd never find you," she said.

"You and me both, baby."

I WASN'T kidding. This angel could use my toothbrush any time. Her skin was a honey yellow, and her eyes slanted scarcely more than some white girl's I've known. She was wearing a tailored, dark green suit and with that long, black hair in a page-boy over her shoulders, brother!

"What's been keeping you?" I asked.

She smiled. "You should try to retrace your steps this afternoon, Mr. Dooley. But aren't you curious to know who I am?"

"Huh-uh. I'm satisfied the way it is."

"You don't remember me, then?"

I shook my head.

"You walked right past me this morning."

"I must've been crazy."

"I was at the dock," she explained, gently disengaging her hand from my paw, "waiting for Sam, Sam Chu."

The awful truth smacked me between the horns. "You're his—his—"

"Sam and I are engaged."

I slumped down in the booth. Dooley luck again! I shot a suspicious glance her way.

"Then what're you doing here?"

"Sam. He needs your help."

I added the bourbon fizzing inside my skull. I didn't get it at all. In the first place, if the little punk was in a jam, where did he get off drafting me to haul him out?

"What's the matter—is he hurt?"

She moved her head no—the dim light of the joint mirrored on her black hair like the chill it sent up my back. We had the place to ourselves, but she leaned across the table, whispered the one word.

"Hiding."

"Well," I sighed, "I guess I can't turn

you down now, can I? Let's go."

She thanked me with her eyes. It was wonderful to behold. On the way out I caught the bartender giving her long, beautifully arranged body the o-o. He winked at me. I only wish he'd been right!

Sam Chu's girl wasn't exactly the gabby type. I did manage to get her to break down and tell me her name once we were in a cab. Jade How. But on the subject of Sam she put me off cagily.

"I think he'd rather tell you himself," she said.

Of course, this made sense—if it didn't make conversation. Most of the way to Chinatown we sat on opposite sides of the cab, listening to the meter tick. The scent she used, sandalwood, had me gripping the edge of the leather seat to stay where I belonged.

We paid our cab off at the mouth of a dark alley. Jade had become very nervous. As I turned away from the cab, I found she had melted into the shadows of a doorway. I joined her there, and we waited until the taxi had driven on, leaving the street empty, quiet. A fat Chinese came out of a building across the street and shuffled down the hill, his high-crowned hat square on his head. Silence closed in after him.

"Come, Mr. Dooley," Jade whispered, tugging at my arm.

She led me up the hill, around the corner, and we jay-walked diagonally to the entrance of an old frame building in the middle of the block. We waited for nothing to happen. When it did, she darted out again, cutting back two doors to an unlighted stairway which led to living quarters over a grocery. I had a time with the stairs, trying to follow her quick, light step. Then she unlocked a door and drew me in after her.

I leaned against a wall, gasping for breath, while Jade was only a rustling sound somewhere in the room. She turned on a small, drum-shade lamp and we blinked at each other in the brightness.

THE kid had plenty of taste. The old-fashioned, high ceiling was painted a shade of green to go with her name—the

walls, shell white. Heavy bronze-colored drapes were drawn across the windows. The room was a little empty, indicating a short budget, but the matching davenport and chair, modern, the black lacquered coffee table and a bookcase were carefully chosen. The only Oriental touches were a couple of scroll paintings and a china horse.

Jade went to a door, scratched on it with a long fingernail.

"Sam," she called. "Mr. Dooley is here."

My fry cook came out.

"Dooley!" he said. "I knew I could count on you!"

I shook my head, crossing to the big chair.

"Don't build me up, Sam. I haven't said I'd do anything. I gotta know what this is all about."

"Of course."

I watched him and Jade move to the divan, sit down together. Sam rubbed his hand over his round face, looked at me levelly.

"My father was murdered this afternoon, Dooley," he said. "I'm wanted by the police."

I whistled. "Hit me again."

"I found him beaten to death in his room. The cops had been informed. As a matter of fact, I was almost caught in Dad's room."

"You mean, this might be a frame? Somebody killed your father, waited till you were on the spot, then yelled cop?"

"Perhaps." He was using his poker-playing face, probably out of habit. "But I don't know who that enemy might be."

"How about your Dad? Could he have had an enemy? Though from what you told me, he didn't sound like a party anybody'd want to bump off."

"He wasn't."

We looked at each other until I could feel myself going round-shouldered under the silence.

"I can't say I understand any of this," I said at last, "but there's one point I definitely don't get. Why are you hiding out? Don't you realize you're just directing suspicion to yourself by staying out of sight? Would you be risking much if you offered to play ball with the cops?"

"I'm not ready to talk to the police," Sam said.

"How do you get ready?" I snorted.

Sam made a sandwich of his girl's hand, their fingers intertwined. "When I see the police, I want to be able to present them with a murderer," he said.

"Don't be childish," I exclaimed. "Murderers we don't fool with. If you've got anything, take it to the cops and let them earn their dough."

"I'm afraid they'd boot it, Dooley."

"And I wouldn't?"

His head moved up and down. I started to break it to him that I'm no Ellery Queen, or even a reasonable facsimile. He stopped me.

"Will you let me tell you why?" he asked.

I popped a cigarette in my mouth. "Shoot—and it has to be good!"

Sam left the divan and his girl, lit my cigarette. Then he began walking the floor with his hands shoved deep in his pants pockets.

"I found something in my father's room which makes it clear enough why he was killed," he said. "I think there's a better than even chance that if we follow through with it, we'll find the murderer. The authorities would never get to first base."

"Where do you get such screwy ideas, kid? The cossacks aren't that dumb. Anything I can do, they can do better."

HE TOOK a small piece of paper from his shirt pocket, let me examine it. I thought it looked like a corner torn from a laundry chit and said so. He smiled.

"It's supposed to," he explained. "Actually, it is a piece of a lottery ticket."

"So—?"

"It was in Dad's hand. Apparently he'd been fighting for it when he was killed. Does that suggest anything to you, Dooley?"

"Maybe. It sounds like it was a winning ticket."

Sam nodded. "What do you know about the Chinese lottery?"

"Just the usual scuttlebutt."

"Then you should be able to understand why it would be useless to go to the police with this lead."

I did understand. The cops had had

a bad time with this graft. They'd been trying to break up the lottery for years. Once in awhile they'd make a few arrests, but nothing ever came of it. The story was that the drawings were held in the back seat of a car driving around Oakland and Berkeley, the winning numbers being phoned across the Bay. The way the tickets and winnings were handled was strictly black magic—at least so far as the law was concerned.

Sam was right about the police, but I didn't see how we'd do any better. That's what I told him.

"Before you turn me down," smiled Sam a little wistfully, "can I tell you what I want you to do?"

I waved at him, disgusted. "I'm supposed to find out who cashed in with the rest of that piece of lottery ticket," I answered for him. "Whoever did—is the killer. Simple, but how do I contact the jokers who run the lottery when the whole San Francisco police force hasn't been able to?"

Sam grinned back at me. "You couldn't. But you might get to the head man in Father's tong. Chu Li would know what to do."

I discovered I had a mouthful of loose tobacco from my cigarette. I spluttered to cover what I was thinking. I was willing to be Sam's messenger, but where was it all going to lead?

"Sam—give me one straight answer, and I'm your boy. Why me? Wouldn't it've been a lot simpler in the first place to send—say, Jade? Why did you have her running all over town to look for a drunken Irishman?"

I watched Sam bob his whole head and shoulders. "I almost did," he said.

"What changed your mind?"

"There's some danger involved—for Jade. You see, Dooley, she is giving refuge to a hunted man. If she admitted even seeing me, I'm afraid Chu Li would turn her over to the police before she could tell him all this."

"You think he won't do the same with me?"

Sam's answer cut me off at the pockets. "You're not one of us, Dooley. Chu Li would feel no responsibility for you. Besides, I don't believe I'm asking you to break a law."

"Okay," I said, getting to my feet, "let's have the gimmick. Only you better be right about this—this, what's his name again?"

"Chu Li San. You'll probably find him at his shop on Grant Street—the first block north of California."

"Good. Well—" I dropped my hat on the back of my head and sashayed toward the door—"I hope Chu is on your side, kid."

My hand touched the knob and Jade doused the lamp. I unlocked the door, felt my way into the hall. The lock on the door clicked behind me.

With everything else on my mind I had to wonder about those two. If they ever turned the light on again. . . .

THE easiest part of this whole detail was finding Chu's place of business. I guess you'd call it that, although don't ask me what business. It was one of those little shops on Grant Street.

In the window they carried a snappy line of pickled eels, dried squid and several other items which ought to ward off foreign devils. Inside, there was a counter with nothing on it but a Chinese newspaper and a pair of bony elbows belonging to the horse-faced Cantonese reading it. Behind him, a teakwood cabinet went clear to the overhead—neat little drawers with Chinese writing on them. There were three carved ebony dragon chairs facing the counter. I can't describe how the place smelled, because I haven't the foggiest notion what gave it that odor. Let's settle for interesting.

My filly-faced character stopped reading after I'd stood there a few moments. He put one finger on a vertical column of chicken scratches, to keep his place, and squinted up at me. I gathered I should state my business.

"I'd like to see Chu Li San."

He stared at me as if I'd asked for the phone number of a temple maiden. Finally the wrinkles around his adam's apple began to ripple.

"Sorry," he said.

I waited for the rest of it. That's all there was.

"You mean he isn't here?" I asked. Again a dry, "Sorry."

I leaned down on the counter next to

him, tapped his shoulder. "Look—friend. I'm not selling anything, see. This is strictly a personal matter. I've got to talk to Mr. Chu. You can tell him it's regarding the old gentleman who was murdered today. I have something he'll want to know about. Savvy?"

Whirlaway pitched back off the counter. "Sorry," he said, "Mr. Chu out."

"Fine," I nodded. "Now be a good fellow and tell me where I can find him. This won't keep."

He scrubbed the loose flesh around his chin. The black hair on his head moved forward as far as the puckers on his forehead would allow. To put it mildly, I was being regarded with suspicion. He didn't say how I was doing, but he did go to a wall phone at the back of the shop, dial a number and run off a lot of Chinese. When he came to me again, he was smiling.

"Mr. Chu see you," he said.

"Great. How do I get to him?"

He gave me an address with directions. I thanked him and was on my way. The Eastern races have what they call a Sacred Cow.

How was I to know they also invented the bum steer?

I WENT down the hill from Grant Street, found the alley I was looking for. There was nothing very special about it except that people lived on it. It was dark and it smelled. I lit a few matches and found the number I wanted. I knocked, and eventually the door opened a crack.

"Mr. Chu expects me," I said, hoping I wasn't talking to myself.

I wasn't. At least the door opened enough for me to squeeze in before it was locked again. I made out the body that went with all this idle chatter—about seven feet of it. The man turned and walked down a hall. I took it I was to follow. He opened another door, and I felt right at home.

There was a seven handed poker game fanned around a table in the center of the room. A shaded light hung low over the table, fogged by cigarette smoke, soft on the green cloth. Nobody worried about me. They called for cards, the pot bulged, talk was on the mumble level. Finally, one of the men threw his

hand down and pushed back from the table.

"What can I do for you?" he said.

He was short and stocky, with a heavy chin and eyes he must've copped off a dead cobra. His smile was about as warm as an iceman's handshake.

"Are you Chu Li San?"

He nodded, and the giant who had brought me in relaxed.

"I wouldn't break in on your game like this, Mr. Chu," I apologized, "but as I told your man at the shop, this can't wait."

"Think nothing of it. I haven't had a hand all night. Maybe you'll change my luck."

His voice was high register, like a diamond scratching on glass. I nodded. "I hope so, Mr. Chu. Is there any place we can talk?"

He smiled, and I braced myself to be bitten. "Certainly."

He cocked a shoulder at his stooge and the three of us went across the hall to a small sitting room done up with heavy teak woodwork. In our Western clothes we looked strange against this background. The giant put his back to the door and the boss-man and I perched on square, uncomfortable rosewood chairs.

"Now then, Mr.—ah—ah—" he fished for my name.

I didn't see what I had to lose, so I introduced myself.

"You have my undivided attention, Mr. Dooley," Chu smiled.

"Thanks. I'll give this to you quick. I'm a shipmate of Sammy Chu's. Well, tonight he gets ahold of me and tells me about his dad bein' killed."

His eyes closed and opened again—a nod, junior grade. "That *was* unfortunate."

"Yeah." I lit a cigarette, continued. "According to Sam, he was the first person to see his old man after the murder."

"Are you sure he said *after*?"

"Do I think he killed his dad—is that what you want to know?"

Chu bobbed.

"Would I be here, if I did?" I asked. "And here's why I don't," I added, digging that piece of lottery ticket out of my vest pocket. I handed it over. "Sam-

my found this in his father's hand."

"So—?"

"So maybe it's a motive. Here you got a blind, crippled old man, living by himself. He wins a lot of illegitimate cabbage. Nobody but him and the agent who sold him the ticket know about it. I can see where it'd figure to be a pretty soft touch to that agent. He'd tell the old man there was some mistake about the ticket, and that he'd have to take it back. But for some reason, Sammy's pop is suspicious, won't give it up. So the agent uses force. Probably not too much force, but he knocks the old man off."

"You're very convincing, Mr. Dooley," Chu smiled, manicuring his nails with the corner of the ticket. "I wish I could agree with you. However—" he sighed—"there had been a grudge of long standing between Sam and his father. You wouldn't know about it, of course."

"And the lottery ticket?"

He shrugged. "A plant by Sam."

Our eyes crashed. "Baloney. I don't believe it!" I snapped. "Just this morning Sammy was telling me how he'd saved up enough money to send his dad back to China."

WHAT came from Chu's tight, dark face was supposed to be a laugh. It sounded more like a whip being laid across a bare back.

"Don't be so easy, Mr. Dooley," he said. Naturally, Sam told you that. It proves how carefully he had planned this murder. But none of this has anything to do with you. Tell me, Mr. Dooley, where can I reach Sam? I'd like to talk to him."

He dazzled me with teeth—and spoiled his salestalk. For a minute there he had me going. I could almost believe Sam had suckered me. But that thin smile chased me back where I belonged.

I looked dumb—one of my better acts. "I don't know," I said. "Sam spilled all this in a bar over on Howard Street."

The smile widened. "Surely he expects you to report."

"Why should he? As long as he's still hot, he'll know I didn't do him any good."

"You won't mind if I call you a liar?" The smile had disappeared, and it wasn't

missed. Chu looked past my shoulder, his eyes sparkling in the light.

"Not at all, Doc," I said. "So, if it's all right with you, I'll shove off."

I started to get out of my chair. That was the giant's cue to slap me back. I wasn't surprised. I'd felt him breathing down my neck for the last five minutes. He held me there, my wrists against the square arms of the chair. "Call off this trained slave!" I said.

He didn't. Instead, "Tell me where you're meeting Sam Chu."

"In hell—tending the second furnace as you come down the ladder! I told you I'm not meeting him."

Chu Li took a box of safety matches out of his pocket—and a penknife. I watched him split a match neatly with a pretty fair idea of what was coming. It was.

The giant forced my hand out flat and his boss jabbed the phosphorus end under one of my nails. I started to sweat, not entirely from heat as the match burned closer to my finger. When the phosphorus burst, I yowled.

Before I left school I learned to count up to ten with my shoes on. I know now I must've been skipping. Chu repeated his pyrotechnics more than any ten times, I'm positive. I called him every dirty word I ever heard and a few new ones for the occasion, but I didn't rat on Sammy.

When I ran out of fingers, Chu let his muscle trust bat me around some. For dessert, he knocked me out. The last I remembered was Chu's toothy smile. Good fun!

I had a sweet awakening—on a park bench in Saint Mary's Square, looking at that stainless steel statue of Sun Yat Sen, the father of the Chinese nation.

I gathered up my aching parts and started stumbling toward Bush Street. Right then I didn't give a darn for friend Sammy, or Jade, or Margaret Truman's singing. All my poor, tired old brain could handle was one idea—get back to the ship.

You'd know I wouldn't see a cab. Not the way I needed one. After I'd gone a couple blocks, I had a feeling I was being followed. Frankly, I was too pooped to care.

As I turned off on the Embarcadero,

there was no doubt about it. I heard high heels tapping fast behind me.

"Mr. Dooley!" someone called. "Mr. Dooley, please wait."

I turned. It was Jade How.

She came up slightly out of breath, but still able to gasp, "Mr. Dooley—did you see Chu?"

Maybe I was a little bitter. "Did I ever! What a lovely personality."

It was too dark for me to see how she took that, but from her voice I'd say she was puzzled.

"Why?" she asked. "What happened?"

"Hardly anything a month in the hospital won't fix," I said. "Don't worry about it though—just tell my friend that if he's smart, he'll turn himself in to the first cop he can find!"

"I can't understand this, Mr. Dooley. Chu Li is one of the kindest old men in Chinatown."

"Yeah?" I held my hands up close to her face where she could see. "Well, I didn't get these cooked pinkies making French pastry! If Chu is one of the kindlier gents, I hope I never run into one with a mean streak!"

"I—I can't believe—" she stammered.

Just then a black limousine swung to the curb and three very solid shadows piled out, started moving in on us. I pushed Jade into a doorway behind me.

"Don't look now, honey, but I think Chu sent some persuaders!"

It wasn't much of a scrap. The giant was one of the three. I swung wild, felt his fingers close on my windpipe. My head was banged against a brick wall. The last thing I heard was Jade's scream.

She meant it.

FINALLY, when I knew enough to be unhappy again, I was having my tootsles warmed by a nightstick. The cop on the other end of it asked me what happened.

"I heard a woman screaming bloody murder down here someplace," he said.

It was an effort, but I lurched to my feet, leaned on him. "There's nothing wrong with your ears, officer," I mumbled through the mitten I was using for a mouth. "That's exactly what you heard!"

"Where'd she go?" demanded the lad in blue.

"Go? I think she's bein' fitted for cement galoshes."

"Look, Mac, are you drunk?"

"No—and I don't scream soprano."

I bulled past him, tugging at his arm. "Come on. We can still save a couple lives—or are you on your way home from a masquerade?"

I'd just had a flash of what, with me, passes for intelligence. I knew now why Chu had turned me loose. He'd figured Sammy would try to get in touch, so he'd cast me out like a salmon egg in a trout pool. They had Jade, and I didn't need a direct wire to dope Chu's next move.

But I had a rough go selling it to this cop.

He was a rosy cheeked young Irishman, otherwise I'd never have been able to insult him enough to get in a cab with me.

"All right, Mister," he said after I'd dragged him to the Ferry Building hack stand. "I'll go. But this better not be a gag—or you'n me will wind up in an alley and only one of us will come out."

"Believe me." I told him as our taxi got under way, "I wish that was all I had to worry about."

It wasn't.

We barreled up to Jade's apartment. The bite of burned powder was still in the air when I pushed the door open. The lights were out, but I knew what we were going to see.

Jade—Sammy—dead.

I looked down at the two of them after I'd found the lamp. Jade had fallen across Sammy's chest, as though she'd crawled that far after she was shot. I thought she had.

"Yeah, honey," I said, "the kindest old man in Chinatown."

"What was that?" My cop friend was standing beside me, useful as a buggy whip in a DC-6.

"Skip it," I snapped. What I'd said echoed in my head. It was not my voice, but Jade's—as though she were trying to tell me something. *The kindest old man, the kindest old—old!*

OLD! Wait a minute—the joker I'd seen wasn't an old man, even to a kid

Jade's age. I got the picture then. I'd been tricked by that hungry looking clerk in Chu Li San's Grant Street shop. The Chu I'd met was probably the gentleman who had killed Sammy's pop. No wonder he wanted that piece of lottery ticket—and Sammy, and Jade. Except for this cop's flat feet and the racket he made charging to our "rescue," they'd have had me, too—and a clear title to the lottery ticket.

"Come along, Junior," I said. "We got another call to make."

But the lad was remembering his policeman's handbook—page, chapter and verse. "We don't go anyplace. Mister—not now."

"Would it make you mad to catch the people who did this?"

The big cop shook his head. "That's not my job. I gotta report, 'n you're staying here with me."

I know you can't argue with a book. But you can close it. I eased over beside the lad. Behind my back my hand found Jade's Ming china horse.

"Okay," I said, "be a cop—but for Pete's sake get someone up here who knows the score!" I nodded toward the bedroom door. "The phone's in there, I think."

He bit. "Who're you kidding, Mac? I know a telephone when I see one. It's over—"

He'd taken a step in the right direction when I ruined a thousand years of crockery on his thick, Irish skull. He half-turned, his mouth opened on the bias. I pillowed his head on his cap, scribbled Chu Li's address on the margin of my Union card and stuck it between his fingers.

Then I scrambled.

I LIKE to tore the door off the hinges barging into Chu's shop. The clerk was there, horse-faced as ever. He turned a little green when he saw me.

I went over the counter after him, was beating out a drum break on the deck with his head, when I saw the feet. Two very small, black Chinese slippers, with pointed toes. I raised my eyes and took in what went with the slippers. An old gentleman in a blue silk kimono and skull cap was standing there. I don't think he liked what I was doing.

"Here, here!" he said, protestingly.

I crawled off my victim, hauled him to his feet. "Excuse me, Pop," I grinned to the old gentleman. "I'm just teaching a rat to sing."

"Rat—sing?"

"Right," I said. "You're Chu Li, aren't you?"

The old boy made a show of dignity. "Indeed I am, but what has that to do with your mistreating my clerk?"

"A great deal," I said. "I came here earlier tonight to see you. I had a hot lead on the man who murdered one of your people today. I asked this punk if you were in. He said you weren't."

"Why, Tom," the old gent scolded, "you know I've been upstairs in my quarters all evening."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Chu," I interrupted, "that's only the beginning. Then your clerk called his friends and tipped them off that I was here, and why. After that he sent me over to them to meet you. Well, I didn't. Instead, I've been tortured and beat up, and Sammy Chu and his girl have been shot. I figure, in a way, it's my fault. And for a start I'm going to take some of it out of this character's hide."

"Is this true, Tom?" the old gentleman asked, his hand drifting toward one of the drawers in that teakwood cabinet.

The rat started to shake. I saw why. Mr. Chu had taken a silken cord from the drawer.

"Would you mind, sir," he asked me, "bringing this—this rat into the other room?"

"It'll be a pleasure, Mr. Chu."

We didn't have any trouble getting Chu's clerk to yodel. The threat of the garrote, I should say, the feel of that cord around his neck was enough. He babbled the head man's name and a lot of fast Chinese which didn't mean a thing to me. Apparently, though, Chu was satisfied.

But before he could give me a translation, a herd of burly citizens burst through the shop and spilled into the back room. They were led by a stocky, bull-necked plainclothes cop who announced he was Lieutenant Block of the Chinatown Squad.

He proved what a sharp observer he

was by picking me out from the two Oriental gees.

"Are you James Dooley?" he asked. I confessed.

"You're under arrest!"

"Three people have been killed," I snorted, "and the best you can do is grab me for trying to run down the mob who did it. Can't you stand competition, Lieutenant?"

"Not the kind that knocks out our officers!" snapped Block.

"Okay, okay—I'm it. But will you listen to me?"

He nodded and I filled him in. "Just before you got here," I added to my story, "Chu made his boy talk. He knows the big-shot's name."

"Is he on the level, Mr. Chu?" Block asked with a jerk of his head in my direction.

The old gentleman bobbed. "Unfortunately, yes. Leonard Kong is the man you want."

"Where do I find him?"

"That," I declared, "I can tell you. Let's go!"

I took Block to the house in the alley where I'd met the phony Chu Li. The lieutenant deployed his men in the area, then we went up to the door. He made it an official call by knocking.

WE WAITED a couple minutes and then the door was opened by an ancient Oriental lady—a mask of cracked, yellow porcelain. Block did the talking—in Chinese.

Our girl didn't seem impressed. But she stepped away from the door so we could enter.

"She says she never heard of Kong," Block shot out of the corner of his mouth as we shouldered through the hall.

"Yeah—like I never heard of Mickey Mouse."

The difference was, she could almost prove it.

We made a tour of the house—the room where I'd seen the poker game earlier and where Kong and I had our happy chat. Nothing was changed—ex-

cept there wasn't anyone in the joint.

We were drawing a blank on the second floor when Block remarked, "You're not doing so good, Dooley."

Lucky for me, I didn't need a comeback. In the alley outside it was suddenly Chinese New Year. Except that the firecrackers we heard were the man-killing variety.

By the time we vaulted down the stairs to the front door, it was taking a hammering.

"Lieutenant Block!" someone was shouting. "Lieutenant!"

He threw the door open, and was nearly floored by a big fist aimed at the panel.

"What've you got out here?" Block demanded.

"They came from the house next door," explained the cop. "They tried to make a run for it, and opened fire when they saw we had 'em cut off."

He was holding a bloody handkerchief against the side of his neck. Block was a little short on sympathy.

"They didn't get away?" he barked.

"No, Chief."

"Good. Anyone else hurt?"

"No—an' this's just a scratch. We live right."

Flashlights were picking out bundles of old clothing flat on the cobble-stones. Kong, his huge stooge and three other assorted hoods were about as dead as you can get. Block sent one of his boys to call the meat wagon, turned to me again.

"Good hunting—huh, Dooley?"

"Yeah," I nodded. "I always say—if you wanta shoot rats, the place to get 'em is in an alley."

It was too dark to be sure, but I could imagine Block's vise-lipped grin. "Rats—it's their year."

"What d'ya mean by that, Lieutenant?" asked Dooley, the straight-man.

"In the Chinese calendar, a year is always named for an animal. This happens to be *The Year of the Rat*. Catch?"

I did.

But why do I always have to find these things out the hard way?

The amazing true story of the odd
and baffling Nancy Titterton case!

by JACKSON HITE



In lifting up Mrs. Titterton's body, the killer made a grievous mistake

DIRT of DOOM

THE MURDER of Mrs. Nancy Titterton on Good Friday, 1936, shocked New York City. A short, fragile woman of a delicate beauty, she had been ravished, strangled, and dumped into a bathtub. Quiet and shy, she was a writer and was regarded by editors as a literary artist. She was not the type of person one usually associates with that kind of murder, her beauty being of the quiet rather than the obvious kind.

The solution of her murder has been recognized as an outstanding feat of detection and a feather in the cap of New York police. Most persons vaguely recall

The daily press brings you the story of crime as it occurs—but to grasp the true nature of criminal acts, the perspective of time must be applied and first impressions clarified and analyzed—as they are in this series of true stories based on real cases!

something about a piece of rope being connected with the solution and quite often that piece of rope has been singled out as the clue that solved the case. Actually it was a little blob of dirt that

LITTLE KNOWN FACTS about WELL-KNOWN CRIMES

placed police on the right path, an incident that is practically unknown to the public.

The case began with dramatic suddenness at about 4:30 Friday afternoon, April 10, 1936, Good Friday. Two men, Theodore Kruger, an upholsterer, and John Fiorenza, his assistant, were returning with a love seat they had picked up the previous day for repairs. It had been a rush job. Mrs. Titterton was expecting company for the holiday weekend and had requested that the couch be repaired by Friday afternoon.

The two men eased their burden into the narrow entrance to 22 Beekman Place, a fashionable address, and rang the downstairs bell to the fourth floor apartment occupied by the Tittertons. The building was a reconditioned five-story walkup brownstone.

When there was no answer, Kruger made a face. Mrs. Titterton had been explicit in her instructions that the couch had to be ready Friday afternoon and had told the upholsterer she would be home at that hour. Now it appeared to Kruger that all their rushing seemed to have been in vain.

Ring Bell in Vain

On the off-chance that the downstairs bell might be out of order Kruger directed Fiorenza to go up and try the apartment bell. A few minutes later the assistant returned.

"Nobody answers," he reported, "but the front door is a little bit open."

"Maybe she left it unlocked for us to make the delivery," Kruger remarked, and the two men carried the love seat up the winding stairs to the fourth floor. The hall door led directly into the living room where the men placed the sofa in the same position they had seen it the day before. Kruger left his bill on the chair. As they were about to leave he decided to jot down the telephone number so he could call Mrs. Titterton later and see if she approved of his work.

There was no phone in that room and so he stepped into the adjoining library and finally into the back bedroom where there was a telephone on a small table next to the fireplace.

Kruger wrote down the number and as

he turned to leave he noticed that the bathroom door at the far end of the room was partly open and the light there was on. He caught a glimpse of a pair of stockinged feet.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Titterton," he called out. "I guess you were in the bath and didn't hear us ring."

Kruger's voice trailed away. He realized that the legs were sticking out of the bathtub at a strange angle. He moved slowly toward that room and walked in. He leaned over the tub. His excited shouts brought Fiorenza, who had been waiting in the living room, to his side.

"Look," he said pointing to the tub, his arm trembling. The body of Mrs. Titterton, nude except for the stockings, was in the bathtub. A red silk blouse and the top half of a pair of her pajamas had been knotted tightly about her throat.

It was Fiorenza who had the presence of mind to call police but he was so excited that he had difficulty in dialing the number and the trouble operator cut in and relayed his call to headquarters.

Within a few minutes radio officers and various detectives began streaking toward the address. Captain Edward Mullins, veteran head of the Homicide Squad, took active command.

The murder also marked the first appearance of an earnest group of young plainclothes officers at the scene of an important crime. They were members of the newly organized Technical Research Laboratory, which despite its impressive name, contained very little technical equipment at that time. The scientific detective squad was the brainchild of Chief Inspector John J. O'Connell who had combed through the department records for young officers with college training, particularly in chemistry and physics.

The other officers at the scene grinned at the young test-tube detectives, as they were quickly dubbed by the old-timers on the force, began hunting through the apartment, scraping up dust into envelopes and blowing fingerprint powder about the four-room apartment everywhere but the ceilings.

Captain Mullins, however, encouraged the laboratory men. "If these lads can

find evidence in a test tube, that's good enough for me," he remarked. "This case looks like a headache and I want all the help I can get."

The technical men used the recently discovered silver-nitrate method for bringing up fingerprints and the skeptical watchers were surprised when they saw Kruger's palm and fingerprints brought up on the white bathtub. Prints seldom can be brought out on such material with ordinary fingerprint powder. The experts also raised Fiorenza's fingerprints on the telephone.

Fingerprints Check Stories

This checked with the story told by the two men. Kruger had leaned over the tub and a demonstration showed that his fingerprints upheld his story. Fiorenza had left his prints on the instrument when he telephoned police, which also jibed with his story.

The technical experts combed through every inch of the apartment without locating any other prints of value. The fire-escape was freshly painted and there were no footmarks on it showing that the killer neither had entered nor fled that way. The laboratory men gathered up the coverings from the twin beds. One of the bed spreads was rumpled indicating that the killer had attacked the woman there. The men took the bed apart, taking everything with them to their laboratory for further inspection.

The apartment also was the hub of much other activity. While the scene might have appeared to be of indescribable confusion to an outsider, the officers were working according to well defined plans. Mullins had sent out men to interview everybody living in the building, others to canvass neighbors in adjoining structures, still others to move about the section picking up what tidbits they might overhear. As disjointed bits of information came in, other men were assigned to follow through. In this way, within a short time after police had been notified, some 65 detectives were actively engaged on the case.

The first person to be checked in any case of murder involving a wife is the husband. Detectives quickly learned

that Lewis H. Titterton, husband of the murdered woman, had been at work all day. He was an official of one of the major broadcasting networks.

The building was undergoing some renovations and a crew of four painters and several plumbers had been working in the structure all week. However, only one of the painters had reported for work on Good Friday. Men were sent to check on the others. The painter at work said he had been doing some brush up work in the hall with green paint and had not been near the Titterton apartment.

A woman living on the next floor reported that a mysterious caller had rung her bell twice before the murder, each time asking for somebody else. She said he had been very breezy and fresh in his actions. Since sneak thieves often wander through buildings ringing doorbells and on the lookout for vacant apartments to plunder, men were directed to search for the man. It was possible that such a thief had found the door to the apartment unlocked and entered only to be discovered by Mrs. Titterton. If the man had a record and faced a virtual life sentence, he might have committed the murder in a desperate attempt to get away.

The small piece of cord was discovered after the arrival of Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Thomas A. Gonzales. No body can be moved until permission is given by the medical officer. The cord, tan in color, was found under the body when the murdered woman was lifted out of the bathtub. The M.E. pointed to marks on Mrs. Titterton's wrists and said that the killer had bound her hands, later cutting the cord. The piece found in the tub was too short to have been used for that purpose. No matching cord was found in the apartment.

Captain Mullins had the cord sent to the technical laboratory for inspection and assigned a man to try and locate the manufacturer, hoping to trace it that way.

The ringing of doorbells up and down the street produced a possible witness. He was a writer who lived several doors away. He told detectives that he had noticed a Negro in blue overalls on the roof of the building about 11 o'clock and he

thought the man had been acting suspiciously.

Alive in Morning

The time soon became significant. A woman friend was located who said that she had spoken to Mrs. Titterton about 10:30 that morning. A delivery boy for a local dry cleaner said he had called with a dress for Mrs. Titterton about 11:30 and had received no answer when he rang the downstairs bell. Officers couldn't shake his story that he had not gone upstairs but remained in the lobby and left when he received no answering buzz to his ring. This set the time of the murder between 10:30 and 11:30 that morning.

One immediate result of narrowing the time of the murder was to definitely clear Titterton of any possible suspicion. He had been at work in his office during that fatal hour.

A resident of the building said that he had heard a woman calling the janitor's name several times. The witness thought the woman had sounded frightened but assumed that it was some household matter and had not made any inquiry. He placed the time at about 11 o'clock, which was the time the man had been seen on the roof. The janitor, who was wearing overalls, was questioned and said he had not heard any woman calling him. He denied he had been in Mrs. Titterton's apartment that day.

He had been reluctant to enter the apartment when the officers first arrived and they had attributed it to a natural reluctance some people have at death scenes. Now the detectives began to wonder. The janitor's clothing was tested for bloodstains, the tests being negative. Finally released after hours of questioning, two men shadowed him constantly for several days watching his every move.

The delivery boy for the dry cleaning store also was kept under constant surveillance after he was questioned.

Although the officers went through the death apartment with fine-comb thoroughness they found no other clues. There was no sign of a struggle in the apartment but since Mrs. Titterton weighed only about 100 pounds, she

could have been overpowered quite easily.

Nothing seemed to have been taken from the apartment and there was no sign that any of the dresser drawers had been rifled. Inquiry was made into the background of the slain woman in the hope that a lead might be picked up if revenge had been the motive. Mrs. Titterton had been Nancy Evans of Dayton, O., and had attended Antioch College. She was working on a book and lived a quiet, almost isolated existence. Her past was blameless.

The painter who had been at work in the building became a prime suspect for a time. The scientific sleuths reported they had found several smudges of green paint on the bedspread and the painter had been working with green paint. Although he was grilled by relays of detectives he clung to his story that he had been working on several floors below and had not been up on the fourth floor at all that day.

The officers were well aware that quite often killers "discover" the bodies of their victims. Kruger and his assistant, Fiorenza, were questioned and both said they had been at work, actually doing the repair job on the sofa which brought them to the murder scene. Since it had been Kruger who had sent Fiorenza upstairs to check the apartment even when there had been no answer to the doorbell, and it was Kruger who went into the bathroom and found the body, police probed into his background only to give him a clean bill of health.

Investigation Drags Along

Despite the unceasing efforts of all the detectives working on the case, ten days passed without any sign of a break. Newspapers had gradually relegated the story to the back pages and it seemed headed for the unsolved file. Police Commissioner Valentine told reporters that "it was a tough case."

Meanwhile the scientific detectives were working away quietly on their own. They had flashed the news of the green paint to the others but this clue had petered out. The painter was in the clear and Mrs. Titterton, herself, might have brushed against some of the fresh paint

while going up or down the stairs and then inadvertently transferred the paint to the bedspread. Or the killer might have brought it with him, but this did not make the painter the killer.

The small tan cord was examined under a microscope. It had been cut with the same sharp blade on both edges indicating that it could have been part of a larger piece used to tie up Mrs. Titterton. An analysis of the cord showed that one of the fibres in it was bristle and so detectives concentrated on manufacturers using such fibres. While it cut down on the number of makers to be interviewed, it still left plenty of leg work since first the manufacturer had to be found and then shipments traced in hope that it would lead to the retailer who had sold the cord.

The bedspread had been examined by the test tube detectives under powerful lights and they discovered the faint outline of a man's footprint in the material. Tests indicated that a man had to step down with full force to leave such an imprint. The scientific detectives deduced that the killer had stepped on to the low bed in order to pick up Mrs. Titterton after the murder and carry her into the bathroom.

The test tube detectives also found a small piece of dirt on the bedspread. They realized that it could have been carried into the room by the small army of police officers who were at the scene but they thought it more likely that the dirt had come from the shoe of the killer as he stepped on the bed.

To the naked eye and even under the microscope it looked just like a sample of ordinary dirt that one might pick up on a shoe walking through the street, but the men of the scientific laboratory, working with meager equipment went ahead and made detailed tests. Scientific tests cannot be hurried and require much time and so days passed as the men put the small clump of dirt through various tests. They finally found one tiny sliver of a white hard bristle. This was sliced in half and studied under powerful microscopes.

The scientific sleuths finally decided that the tiny sliver was a horse hair. They also found several other even smaller pieces of black horse hair mixed

in the dirt. As a double check they submitted the pieces to Dr. Alexander O. Gettler, famed toxicologist of New York City. He came to the same conclusion that the pieces were horse hairs.

The news of the latest find was flashed to Captain Mullins. He studied the report and rubbed his chin. Finally he summoned two of his crack men, Detectives Hayden and Swander. "These tiny bits found in the dirt are going to send the killer to the chair," he prophesized. "How?" his men demanded.

Captain Mullins took the small piece of cord that had been under the body and handed it to Detective Hayden. "They use horse hair in upholstery stuffing," he remarked. "Take a walk down to Kruger's shop and see if it matches any kind of cord he has there, but don't let anybody there notice you doing it."

A Roll of Cord

While Detective Swander engaged Kruger and Fiorenza in conversation, Hayden moved about the shop and found a roll of upholsterer's cord in the back. He could tell at a glance that it matched the piece found under the body.

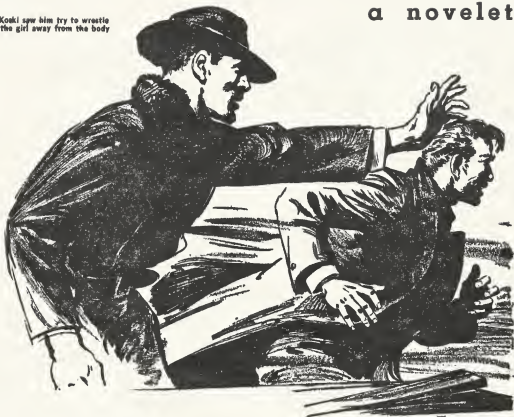
Previous checking on Kruger definitely placed him in his shop during the murder hour. He was again questioned about his assistant. He admitted that Fiorenza had not been at work during the morning but said his helper had gone to court to report to his probation officer. He had been convicted for stealing a car. As soon as Captain Mullins heard the story he smiled. "Fiorenza's our man," he said. "He forgot that courts are closed on Good Friday."

The suspect was picked up and rushed to the Harbor Precinct for questioning. For over twelve hours Fiorenza held out. "I don't want to die in the electric chair," he finally moaned, and then confessed the attack murder.

The small clump of dirt had pointed the finger directly at Fiorenza. Tracing the piece of rope would have required months without any certainty of success. He was convicted and electrocuted for the murder, the first of many killers brought to justice by the test tube detectives of the technical research laboratory.

Koski saw him try to wrestle
the girl away from the body

a novelet



*Steve Koski follows a trail of blood and broken seashells
to a redhot holdup and killing on the New York waterfront!*

CHAPTER I

JUNK BOAT

LEUTENANT Steve Koski leaned against the bulkhead of the pilot-house, motionless as a statue. In the faint glow from the binnacle bowl he looked like a statue, too. A rugged, weather-bronzed figure, Koski wore a melton jacket that was buttoned close around his neck. A beat-up felt, soggy with moisture, was pulled low over his ice-blue eyes that searched the pale opaqueness of the fog.

He didn't move even when Sergeant Mulcahey spoke on a subject that touched a sore spot.

"I see by the mornin' papers," the ser-

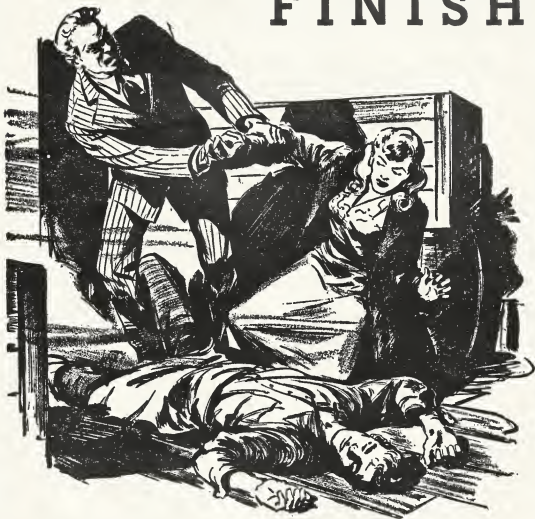
geant said, putting the wheel down a spoke, "that Commissioner Andrews has finally succeeded in breakin' up that ring of dock thieves which has been nibblin' away at pier cargoes to the tune of sixty, seventy thousan' a month. Commissioner, in a pig's pazook! We know who rounded up them rats!"

"Sure." Koski continued to squint into the curtain of mist blanketing the Brooklyn waterfront. "But what's the use beefing, Irish? The Harbor Division's always been the stepchild of the Police Department. It always will be."

"It gripes my innards, though," Mul-

by STEWART STERLING

GUNMETAL FINISH



cahey said. He swung the *Vigilant's* bow a point toward the nun buoy at the head of Governor's Island. "We stay out, twenty hours a stretch, sloppin' around in freezin' rain. We let them cargo snatchers use us for clay pipes in a

shootin' gallery. An' then, when they're in front of them floodlights in Headquarter's lineup, some loud-mouth politician in a soft leather chair tells the taxpayers how he—"

"Clam!" Lieutenant Koski held up a

palm for silence.

Against the jumble of harbor sounds—the mournful clanking of the bell at Buttermilk Channel, the deep hoarseness of a tramp steamer feeling her way through the shrouding fog like a blind man, the high, frantic toots of a tug—came the hollow *turkey-turkey-turkey* of a two-cycle motor, echoing flatly over the calm surface of the water.

Sergeant Mulcahey bent over the binnacle, peering forward, his plump, ruddy features burnished by the glow spilling up from the card.

"It's a junkie," he announced. "I can't see him, though—"

"The sucker's running without lights," Koski picked up a lacquered megaphone, stepped back to the cockpit. "Cut her, Irish," he said to the sergeant.

MULCAHEY silenced his hundred and eighty horses. Koski put the mouthpiece of the megaphone to one ear and swept the wide end of the fibre funnel in a slow semi-circle. At one spot, on the port quarter, the hollow *turkey-turkey* which had seemed to come from every point on the compass, sounded sharply louder. The lieutenant pointed.

"Sic 'em, Tige," he said to Mulcahey. "He bit your father."

The sergeant cut the motor in fast, angled the nose of the patrol boat around in a rush. He moved the throttle-bar forward. The *Vigilant's* bow lifted. Water seethed past the gunnels, boiled astern.

Koski switched on the big searchlight. A probing finger of white poked through a hundred feet of milky murk—and touched something red.

"Right rudder," Koski cautioned. "It's a tramp. The junkie's run in behind her."

The police boat veered off, heeling over to its cockpit coaming. The rusty red hull of the tramp bulked darkly above them, its running lights vague in the mist. Shouts of alarm came down to the two officers as the *Vigilant* surged under the steamer's counter, swung wide to avoid her threshing screw, and plunged like a rocking horse gone mad across the bobbling wake, after the junk boat.

"The junkie's heading down Butter-

milk." Koski used the megaphone as a sound-tracer again.

Mulcahey spun the spokes. "Tell me now," he complained, "why wouldn't we run across this miscreant an hour ago, instead of when we're headin' for Pier One to sign off duty? An' me, with a very tasty dish waitin' my beck an' call!"

"Your dame'll wait." Koski caught a low gray shadow in the blurred cone of the searchlight. The shadow slid around the tail barge of a long tow, which was headed toward the Narrows, and vanished. "Pour it on, Irish," he said.

Sergeant Mulcahey fiddled with the controls. The motor's roar lifted to a high, shrill pitch. The guns in the bulkhead racks began to chatter from the vibration.

"That junkie's probably got a boat-load of ol' manila, Steve. He'll claim he bought it. Nobody'll be able to prove different an'—"

"I'll be able to prove he's forfeiting his license by running in a fog without lights," Steve Koski retorted. "And don't kid yourself. He's not scotting away like that with any stolen rope. If that's what it was, he'd have dumped it overboard long ago and waited for us to come up with him."

The police boat closed the gap swiftly. The junk boat turned, twisted to evade the searchlight, then wheeled, at last, toward the deep shadows of shore.

"He's makin' for the Gowanus!" Mulcahey swore softly. If the junk boat should gain that narrow, hulk-lined canal to find him would be like hunting a rat under a barn.

Steve Koski lifted the repeating rifle out of its brackets. The quarry was no more than two hundred yards ahead. Mulcahey kept the long finger of light on the hunched figure crouching beside the junk boat's motor housing.

A stub-nosed diesel tug, with a beard of rope matting trailing over its bow, came chugging out of the mouth of the canal. The junk boatman headed right at the tug. Koski crawled up on the forward deck.

"Swing out a point, Irish," he called to Mulcahey. "He's smack in line with that tug's wheelhouse."

The tug began to turn. The cargo

lighter the tug was towing swung out and the junk boat slewed. Its bow began to disappear behind the lighter.

Koski fired.

A searchlight came on then above the tug's wheelhouse. It felt its way across the water to the police boat. When it touched the square green flag whipping at the *Vigilant's* signal mast, the light winked out abruptly. The tug sheered off, to get out of the way. Mulcahey called. "Did you hit the junkie?"

Koski shook his head. "I wasn't trying to. I was aiming at his gas tank. Bear down on her, Irish."

They thundered into the mouth of the evil-smelling canal, their exhaust reverberating from the narrow walls. The junk boat was rounding a wharf topped by a ramshackle galvanized shed.

"Half," Koski yelled, from his position on the forward hatch.

Mulcahey slowed the motor to 600 r.p.m., sweeping the shore to starboard with the blinding brilliance of the searchlight.

A BEAM of the iron shed, Sergeant Mulcahey caught the stern of the junk boat full in the glare, fifty feet ahead. He grabbed the clutch lever, went into reverse.

The *Vigilant* lost way, rumbled to a foaming halt ten feet off the pier head. The junk boat had its nose in the mud beneath the pilings of the pier.

"I can't get the light down on him, Steve."

"Use your flash," Koski ordered. "And watch yourself."

Mulcahey poked the hand torch over the coaming. From the gloom beneath the pier a gun spat. A stanchion on the police boat rang loudly, lead ricocheting off into the fog.

Koski's rifle answered, once. There was no return shot.

"I might have hit him that time, Irish. Back around under there so I can get a

boat hook on him."

The *Vigilant* churned the foul-smelling water. It moved out, then came back as Koski hurried aft. He kept the repeater cradled in his right arm even when he snatched the boat hook from its chocks. He kept low behind the stern transom.

"Another couple feet astern, Irish."

The stern of the police boat inched in under the wharf. Koski leaned out then, hooked the after thwart of the junk boat with his ten-foot pole.

"Slow ahead, Irish."

Mulcahey moved her out into the canal. Koski hauled the junk boat out into the glare of the sergeant's flashlight. The man who lay slumped across the motor housing was dead. His jaw hung slackly open. His eyes stared unblinking into the light.

"Sureshot Steve," Mulcahey marveled. "You sure got him good."

Steve Koski went overside, dropped lightly onto the junk boat's bow thwart. He shook his head. "Somebody else got him first, Sarge." He pointed to the water sloshing along the floorboard. It was the color of claret. "He never bled that much, in half a minute."

"I see what you mean," Sergeant Mulcahey studied it. "Yeah. You could be right about that." The sergeant took the bow line, threw hitches around a cleat on the *Vigilant's* stern rail. "But what I'll be wanting to know, Steve—what did the poor devil have in the boat anyway, that was worth dyin' for? Never have I seen a junkie with less to—"

"He's no junkie," Koski held up the man's arm. The sleeve of his overcoat glistened silkily in the light. "You ever see a water rat wearin' a hundred an' fifty dollar overcoat?"

He fished a hat out of the pink water. "Or a twenty buck kelly?"

Mulcahey scratched his head. "Well, what d'you know?"

"I think I've seen this lug's face before, somewhere, Irish," Koski said.

"In the Commissioner's private portrait gallery, no doubt—"

Mulcahey broke off. From the pilot-house came a sepulchral voice.

"*Vigilant!* . . . *Vigilant!* . . . Come in! . . . Come in!"

NEXT ISSUE

THE DEAD DON'T DIE

An Exciting Mystery Novelet

By BRUNO FISCHER

AND OTHER STORIES

CHAPTER II

HOLDUP AND MURDER



ULCAHEY hurried to the squawk box and slapped down the *Talk* toggle. "Patrol Boat Nine calling Doubleya Enn Pee Dee. Over."

The hollow tones of the speaker were croaking as he clicked the lever to *Listen*.

"Where are you, *Vigilant*? Over."

"Gowanus Canal. Take it."

"Report immediately to Pier Ten, Fulton Market, on a nineteen, a thirty-two. Acknowledge."

"Nineteen and thirty-two at Fulton Fish Market," Mulcahey repeated.

Koski yelled, "Tell 'em we're scooting, Sarge."

"We're on our way, now. Over."

"Notify on arrival, *Vigilant*. Keep on the box. Doubleyou Enn Pee Dee to Pee Dee to Pee Bee Nine, four twenty-six peeyem, March twenty-eight, authority Police Telegraph Bureau. That is all."

The two-way was silent.

Steve Koski was searching the dead man's clothing when Sergeant Mulcahey got to the cockpit.

"We're getting our noses rubbed in it, Steve. Holdup an' murder at Fulton Market."

"Get her spinning, Sarge. I'll poke around on this tub for a few minutes. Keep me tied in short."

The patrol boat made a tight circle, churned suds under the bow of the towed junk boat. Koski squatted on the stern thwart, examining the stuff he'd frisked from the corpse's pockets: Alligator wallet, swollen with folding money. Three dollars in silver. Keys on ring. Gold pocket knife. Silk handkerchief. Gold pen. Envelope with two airline tickets, New York to Havana via Miami.

"On the midnight plane tonight, eh?" Koski eyed the body dispassionately. "I'm afraid they wouldn't take you now unless you were boxed, mister. Wonder who was supposed to go on that little trip with you?"

In the disc of the flashlight, the dead man stared glassily at Koski's shoes. The lieutenant studied the low forehead, the dark hair growing within an inch

of the eyebrows. The long, thin nose with the slightly upturned, reddened tip. The small, pursy lips, the gold-capped incisor. The last time that face had looked up at Koski had surely been from a police flyer.

His name was Eddie—something. It began to come back, now. . . .

He snapped his fingers! Eddie—Eddie-the-Switch, that's who it was! Koski couldn't remember the criminal's last name—it didn't matter, anyway—but the Marine Division's crack plainclothesman couldn't forget the reason given on the Wanted Bulletin for Eddie's being known as the Switch: "*So-called because of frequent boasts that he would light somebody up!*"

Eddie-the-Switch had killed a payroll messenger down South somewhere—Birmingham, if Koski recalled correctly. After beating that rap, he had been picked up on another manslaughter charge in Kansas City. He'd shot his way out of jail there. Yeah. Quite a customer, this Eddie-the-Switch had been.

But how had a hot rod like that happened to be on this junk boat? He certainly had been a long way from the accommodations on the Nightliner to Miami!

Steve Koski fished the .45 out of the wine-colored water that sloshed from side to side over the junk boat's propeller shaft as the *Vigilant's* wake bounced the eighteen-footer wildly. It was an Army Colt—with a kick Koski was glad he hadn't felt.

BUT, Koski realized, the man must have been dying before the rifle bullet drilled that hole beneath his ear. There was a soggy redness, the size of a dinner plate, on the right side of the man's coat, from the third to the fourth button. Blood from that wound had stained the water. Eddie-the-Switch wouldn't have bled much after Steve's .303 hit him.

Koski looked at the gunman's hands. The man wore no gloves. Yet there were no smudges of oil or grease on palms or fingers.

"I could stand to know who cranked that flywheel for you, Eddie," Steve Koski muttered.

He combed over the boat itself. In the stern locker, he found a jug half filled with muscatel, a burlap sack with a dozen bronze fittings—nearly new—cleats, swivel-hooks, turnbuckles. Under the bow thwart were a couple of lard cans containing brass grommets and faucets and some new copper wire. On the floorboards lay a dozen crumpled-up balls of sopping newspapers, four soaking-wet men's socks with oyster shells in them, and more oyster shells between the boat's ribs.

Oyster shells? In old socks? For what?

Even if somebody had opened up a few dozen oysters on a junk boat, they'd have thrown the shells over, wouldn't they? Lieutenant Koski puzzled over it.

Mulcahey was using the megaphone to shout back to him over the roar of the exhaust. "Sounds like they got everything but the fire engines out, over there, Steve." He was indicating the Fulton Market section.

Koski put the Army Colt in Eddie's hat, went to the bow of the junk boat and hauled in on the tow line. "Coast her, Irish."

The exhaust quieted. The wake subsided. Steve Koski dropped hat and gun into the cockpit.

"Heave that tarp, Sarge," he called.

When Koski got it, he tossed the heavy canvas over the dead man, gave Mulcahey his hand and went up over the stern transom into the *Vigilant's* cockpit.

With the big motor throttled down, Koski could hear the sirens on the Manhattan shore plainly. There was the rising wail of the patrol coops, the agonized screech of an ambulance, the clanging gong of the truck bringing reserve patrolmen.

"I've heard the band from P. S. Fifty-one sound just like that," Mulcahey muttered, "rend'rin' *A Hot Time in the Ole Town, Tonight*. That sounds now like the Commissioner was arrivin', with all the cameramen lined up with the flash bulbs."

"We have something for the pix boys, back there." Koski said, the nod of his head indicating the junk boat. He watched the low roofs of the oyster sheds and fish houses emerge from the

thinning fog that wreathed the tall, light-spattered towers of the financial district. "We caught a pretty big mackerel, ourselves, Irish," he went on. "But I don't think we'll let the lens-men snap him, the way he is now."

Mulcahey slowed the *Vigilant*, searching for a berth among the fleet of purse seiners, oyster dredges, halibut boats and Block Islanders that were crowding against the fish market wharves.

"You find out anything about him, Steve?" the sergeant asked.

"I remember him from a Kansas City flyer," Koski answered. "His name is Eddie-the-Switch. And a bad boy with a trigger he was. We were lucky somebody else had pretty well taken care of him before we ran him aground."

THE sergeant grunted. "I am not what you can call a careless man with a dollar, except maybe where chicks are concerned, but I will offer a chunk at six, two and even that when it comes out in the papers, the Commissioner himself personally directed the dragnet which cornered the internationally famous desperado."

"There's the ambulance, Koski said. "Over by Shoalwater Seafoods. Run in alongside that oyster dredge, the *Mollie B*."

Sergeant Mulcahey maneuvered the black-hulled patrol boat against the battered rubrail of the dredge. Koski sprang to the foredeck.

"Get through to Pier One on the two-way," he called back to the sergeant. "Ask them to look up the dope on 71J22RCH." He pointed to the crudely-lettered license number painted on the junk boat's bows.

"Check," Mulcahey said. "Give the Commissioner my love."

Koski looped the bow line around the *Mollie B's* starboard samson post, crossed the decks between yawning cargo hatches, went through a door on the water side of the pier and into the huge fish shed.

He was in the weigh office of the wholesale house. On the other side of the high wire screen, a group of men clustered around something on the floor of the office. Koski saw patrolmen in uniform, bristling precinct detectives, a

couple of ambulance internes, a doctor, four or five high-booted men in white rubber aprons, a scattering of fishboat men in oilskins.

He pushed open a gate in the wire fence, went through. A patrolman blocked his way until Koski held out his cupped hand with the gold shield.

"Sorry, Lieutenant," the patrolman apologized. "Couldn't see you. Lights kind of blind you in here."

"Sure. What happens?"

"Guy with a gun stuck up the kid who was lugging the day's receipts out to the armored truck. Kid put up a battle, got killed. Gunman dropped one of the truck guards, too. They just got him into the ambulance a minute ago."

"What about the holdup man?"

"He got away in the confusion, Lieutenant. Ran out to the street. They're after him, out there, now."

"Yuh?" Koski shoved through the group.

A boy of twenty or so—a nice-looking blonde youngster who looked as if he ought to be in a basketball uniform rather than in the dirty oyster-stained apron he wore—lay on the floor. He had his knees curled up under him and his hands were clasped around his middle so—for an instant—Koski had the illusion that he was only badly hurt.

A divisional detective captain caught sight of Koski. "Hello, Lieutenant. They call you in on this?"

"They hung out the lantern, yeah," Koski said. "'One if by land, two if by sea.' And we were on the opposite shore. Took us a few minutes to get over here."

The divisional detective captain wrinkled his nose at the strong fish smell—something Koski was so used to he never noticed it.

"Little delay doesn't make any difference," he told Koski. "Appreciate your help, but we've got the guy penned up, down the block."

"You have?"

"They're gettin' ready to go in after him, now, with tear gas. Couple truck drivers saw him run in a clam shed, yuh."

"Are you sure he's the one?"

"Yuh, yuh." The detective captain clapped Koski's shoulder encouragingly. "We got him, all right. Without any help

from the Marine Division. Some other time, Lieutenant. Some other time—and thanks."

He walked away.

CHAPTER III

THE GIRL IN THE CASE



MAN seized Koski's arm. "You an officer?"

Lieutenant Koski looked him over. The man was fiftyish, gray-haired, six feet and over, heavy built, big boned even to his weather-leathered face. The faded-blue fisherman's eyes searched the lieutenant's anxiously.

"Yeah. Why?"

"Can't you do something about getting Bill's body away from here, before his father sees him again—like this?"

"We have to leave him until the Homicide crew have shot their pictures," the Harbor Squad detective explained. "Who's his father?"

"Why, Cale is." The big man seemed surprised. "Thought you knew. Caleb Telfer, my partner. I'm Win Negus, cap'n the *Mollie B.* Cale is head of Shoalwater Seafoods. We own the boats and the wholesale house together. He had Bill workin' here, to learn the oyster business."

"Was his father here when he got shot?"

"Hell's bells a-booming—that's what keeled Cale over! The boy died right at Cale's feet. It knocked the old man out, colder'n a Newfoundland tunny. Doc's in there now, tryin' to bring Cale around."

"You see the killing, yourself?"

"No." Negus jerked a thumb gloomily toward the shellfish bins out by the open end of the shed. "I was over by the checker, talkin' to our lobster buyer, when I heard the shots and the boys yellin'. By the time I'd turned around, it was all over—except for this fella scuttling away, there by the clam barrels."

Koski cocked an ear at the flurry of police whistles out in the street. Either the reserve men had rounded up their prisoner, or the chase was heading in a different direction.

"What'd this holdup guy look like, Mister Negus?"

The dredger captain scowled thoughtfully. "I'm not one of these here camera-eyes," he said. "But near's I rec'lect, he was about twenty-five years old, not as tall as you are by a couple of inches, kind of thin and sallow-complected. He was wearin' gray pants or maybe dungarees an' a sweater—cap, I think. He had this bundle under his arm. I didn't rightly notice what it was because, by that time, I'd seen the guard layin' on the floor and a couple other guards runnin' in from the truck. I didn't see Bill at all, 'till later."

"They got him!" somebody out in the street yelled. The cops got him!"

Koski grunted skeptically. Win Negus's description hadn't sounded to the Marine Division man like that of a stick-up specialist. Those boys were usually pretty careful dressers—the sweater was off-key, somehow.

As far as the man the precinct boys seemed to have cornered, he didn't fit in with Koski's notion of a criminal clever enough to have planned a coup like this, either. The holdup man had evidently known just when the day's receipts would be handed over, and had timed his attack shrewdly enough to intercept the money before it got in the hands of the armored truck guards. Was it reasonable to suppose he'd figured all that out so neatly—and then left his getaway to such a slipshod chance as running out in the street, without even an escape car at the curb? There was a false note, somewhere.

"How much was stolen, Mister Negus?" Koski asked.

"Don't know, exactly. Cale will." The fishboat man pushed open the door to the liner office.

An ambulance interne was holding an ampule under the nose of a middle-aged, snowy-haired, apple-cheeked man who lay back in an old-fashioned oak chair, his fingers clawing at the arms. His collar had been loosened. His plump, rosy face was shiny with sweat.

"All right to ask a few questions, Doc?" Koski said.

The interne glanced up. "Why—uh—"

Cale Telfer rolled his head loosely

toward the newcomers. "What you want to know?" His voice was deep and gruff, but there was a curious quaver in it.

The interne shrugged, closed his kit and went out.

"How much was stolen?" Koski watched the man's eyes. They flickered swiftly to Negus and away again, as if to question what one partner had said about the other.

CALE lurched up from his chair then, took two unsteady strides to a high bookkeeper's desk. That slanting shelf must have been polished by generations of Telfer elbows, Koski thought.

"Here. Here are duplicate deposit slips." Cale Telfer's trembling fingers passed the paper to Koski.

"Traders and Marine National," Koski murmured, reading. "For deposit—thirty-six thousand, four hundred twelve dollars and eighty-eight cents." Koski's eyes narrowed the least bit. "That's a big haul."

"If you doubt my word, sir—" Cale began.

Negus cut in. "This last Friday before Lent is always one of the biggest days of the year. But it won't hit the firm. We're covered by insurance, aren't we, Cale?"

The wholesaler rubbed a hand over his forehead as if he was dazed. "Yes, of course, Win. But what difference does it make, with Bill—"

"I realize it must be a shock," Koski put the slip in his jacket pocket. "You saw the gunman, Mister Telfer?"

Cale's round face puckered in an agony of recollection. "Clear's I see you, sir. And as near." His forehead continued to wrinkle, his cheek muscles to contract spasmodically as he went on to describe, in terse detail, the man Koski had found in the junk boat. "That's the man, sir. I'd know him, wherever I saw him, even if it was twenty years from now. And I won't rest until he's been punished—if it takes twice that long!"

He collapsed, trembling, into the chair. His face had lost all its color. The rosy cheeks were dull putty.

Negus hurried to him. "But Cale, are you sure? The police are after another—"

Koski warned Negus back with a gesture. "Tell me just what happened, Mister Telfer."

His lips scarcely moving, Cale answered. "I gave Bill the bag—to take out to the armored guards. When Bill got to the weigh scales—this murderer came up behind him—grabbed the bag and—"

"Behind him?" Win Negus cried. "How the devil could he have gotten behind Bill?"

Koski got between the dredger captain and his partner. "Let him tell it, mister," he warned Negus.

"He must have got in the same way he left, Win," Cale said hoarsely. "By the pier door, there at the side—"

"It was locked!" Negus roared. "I locked it myself! I always do, after—"

Koski put an elbow in the dredgerman's stomach, shoved him back. "Clam. Stay clammed. Understand?" Negus fumed, but kept quiet. The Harbor Squad detective touched Cale's shoulder. The wholesaler's eyes were closed.

"Did you tell this to the police when they came?"

Cale opened his eyes wide. "Didn't tell anyone. Nobody asked me anything—until just now."

Behind Koski, Negus cursed thickly. "How in the devil could he have answered questions anyway, when he collapsed? He was out like a light until a couple minutes ago!"

"Yeah," Koski said, continuing to address Cale. He pointed to the door by which he himself had entered the oyster house. "You say the gunman ran this way, out onto the wharf?"

"Yes." Cale panted convulsively. "He grabbed the money bag. The guard coming to meet Bill saw it—pulled his gun. The murderer shot the guard. Bill grappled with him—and got two bullets right—" the father faltered, forced himself to go on—right under the heart. Then the murderer spun around, ran back to the door there—and out. That's all I—I remember. When I saw Bill was—was—"

He sprang up suddenly, lurched at the glass door and stumbled out. Koski turned. Through the partition, he saw a slender, dark-haired girl in a squirrel coat break out of a patrolman's grip,

flying herself on the dead boy's body.

Negus crowded through the door with Koski. But before they could reach Cale Telfer, he was bending over the wailing girl, trying to wrestle her away from his son's body.

"Get—away—from—him!" he raged. "If it hadn't been for you getting your claws in him, you hellcat—this wouldn't have—"

"Cale!" Negus bellowed, breaking his partner's grip on the girl. "For God's sake, man, use a little sense!"

IN THE SCUFFLE, the cop grabbed the girl, hauled her roughly to her feet.

"I'll have to run you in, if you don't obey orders, miss."

"I can't help it," she sobbed. "I can't believe he's—"

She turned away, whimpering, covering her mouth with her hands. Even with her face contorted with anguish, there was a sort of wild beauty in her gypsy-like coloring, her enormous dark gypsy eyes.

Cale mumbled what might have been an apology.

"Sorry," he said. "I was upset. I didn't know what I was saying."

Negus helped him back to the office, explaining, beneath his breath, to Koski, "What Cale meant—if Bill'd been on the *Mollie B.* with me, the way his father wanted him to be, he'd have been ashore now with the rest of the crew. Cale wanted him to learn oysterin' from the beds up, way we did, thirty years ago. All hand-tongin' then. No power hoists like nowadays."

He clattered on. Koski got the impression he was trying to keep the older man from saying anything more that he might regret. But Cale refused to remain silent.

"Bill wouldn't go on the *Mollie B.*," he said bitterly. "Had to work in the Market so's he'd be close enough to that little tramp to see her every night. I ought to have made him sign on with Win!"

Negus squeezed his partner's arm gently. It might have been a sympathetic gesture—or a warning. The head of Shoalwater Seafoods looked up sharply. The eyes of the two men locked for a moment. Then Cale turned his head

away, shuddering as if from a severe chill.

"Who's the girl?" Koski asked.

"Patty Rondo," Negus replied quickly, anxious to take the burden of answering on his own shoulders. "She's an entertainer over at the *Lighthouse*. No real harm in her, I suppose. And there wouldn't have been any in Bill's foolin' around with her, except he got marryin' notions in his head."

Sergeant Mulcahey stuck his head in the wharf door. "I got that dope, Loo-tenant."

"Whatsit, Irish?"

"Number 71J22RCH is licensed in the name of D. J. Felch, Port Richmond. You remember the guy?"

"I'll say I do, Sarge." There had been a midnight meeting between Doojey Felch and the crew of the *Vigilant*—which had resulted in that junkie's conducting his waterfront activities some thirty miles further upriver for a period of six months, less time off for good behavior. Doojey was just the sort to have been mixed up with Eddie-the-Switch. "Ask Headquarters to send out a three-state for him. Put his photo on the six o'clock T.V. program. Doojey would have been the other one in the junk boat, sure."

Mulcahey scowled. "You could be right, Loo-tenant. Still an' all, Pier One reports they have been notified by this selfsame D. J. Felch that his junk boat was stolen this afternoon around two-thirty from where it was tied to a gas barge in Newtown Creek."

"Alibi," Koski said. "And it smells. Doojey was in this just as deep as the rat out in the boat."

"Boat?" Negus reacted as if he'd been touched with a live wire. "You mean—out in the *Mollie B.*?"

Koski moved past the sergeant, out onto the pier. "The man who killed your son is in the junk boat there, on the other side of the *Vigilant*, Mister Telfer."

"Dead?" Cale whispered. "Is he dead?"

"Yeah." Koski stepped onto the dredger, squatting on his haunches. He pointed to the deck just aft a heavy winch. There's blood spatter. That armored truck guard must have plugged

him. He was bleeding pretty bad when he ducked out this door, and crossed the deck here, to get to the junk boat."

"Hell's bells a-booming!" Negus protested loudly, "that junk skiff wasn't here when the holdup happened."

"Sure it was," Koski said. "It was on the far side of your oyster boat, Mister Negus. At low tide, like this, nobody would have seen it from the pier. Probably it was only here a minute anyhow—just long enough for the gunman to hop up on your deck, cross to the pier, and go in and grab the money bags. They'd have timed it to a whisker. Sure."

CHAPTER IV

"I'M YOUR EARS!"



HE PHONE in the office jangled. Cale turned, automatically, to answer it. Steve Koski eyed Win Negus steadily.

"There was some fidoodling with the thirty-six thousand, though," he said to Negus. "That money didn't go into the junk boat with the killer. He didn't have it when we caught up with him."

The master of the oysterman didn't understand. Steve Koski made it clear for him.

"The moneybag the killer took to the junk boat," Koski said, "was filled with socks loaded down with oyster shells and old newspapers—stuff that would weigh about what the day's receipts would total."

"He might have ditched the dough on the dredger here," Mulcahey suggested, "soon's he got outside the shed. Then he could have repacked the bag with—"

"He wouldn't have taken time to do that," Koski interrupted. "Not with all that hell busting loose on the pier." Keeping his eyes on Negus, who seemed suddenly grim and defiant, Koski went on, "The killer couldn't have known the armored truck boys would point out somebody else as the escaping murderer. No. But he might have switched bags, here on the *Mollie B.* He might have left the one loaded with cash, here—and

taken the dummy when he jumped down into the junk boat."

Cale Telfer came back from the phone and stopped at the wharf door. "Detectives want me to make a statement, Win. They're up front of the shed, now."

"Want me to go with you?"

"Uh, uh." Koski stopped the oysterman. "You stay here while the dredger's being searched, Mister Negus."

Cale turned away, his shoulders bowed. "I'll be all right, Win," he said, his voice dull and listless. "Only be a minute, I guess." He walked wearily toward the wire partition.

"Plenty places where you could hide a small bag on a big tub like this, Irish," Koski told Mulcahey. "Mister Negus'll help you use the fine-tooth comb."

The sergeant wiped mist off his face with the inside of his sleeve. "You'll not be with us, hah?"

"I'll be walking down the avenue a bit." Koski stepped quickly onto the pier.

"O-o-o-oh!" Mulcahey's eyebrows went up, the corners of his lips came down. "Like that."

"Yeah." It was an old tip-off Koski had used with his sergeant before. "And watch it, Irish. Nobody goes on the *Mollie B.* Nobody off."

"Not—" Joe Mulcahey sized up Negus, the oysterman gravely—"while breathin', Lootenant."

Koski went on through the wire partition. Cale Telfer was fifty feet ahead of him, but the Harbor Squad lieutenant made no effort to close the gap as the old man stalked past the shucking boards and out into South Street.

Cale's clumsy subterfuge—that the police wanted him to 'make a statement'—hadn't registered for a moment with Koski. When that crusty divisional detective captain got ready to take an affidavit, he didn't request the person concerned to show up at the precinct house. He went and brought him in.

CALE marched to a sleek maroon sedan parked across from the Municipal Fish Market, got in and tramped on the starter. When he pulled out and turned up Catherine Slip, Koski was pointing the wholesaler's sedan out to First Grade Detective Herman Gold-

weiss, patrol car 8, Precinct 2.

"I'm supposed to be posted here until the newspaper men—" the radio car cop began.

"You're supposed to take orders. Get going. Don't let him get away from you," Koski commanded. "Don't crowd him too close."

"That's old Telfer!" Goldweiss protested, pulling the car away from the curb. "Guy whose son got shot!"

"No kiddin'?" Koski seemed mildly surprised.

"What'sa idea tailin' him? They already got the killer."

"They have? Did they find the bag of marbles he was supposed to have hijacked?"

"Nah. He must of stashed it somewhere." The commandeered patrol car slithered around a corner, braked fast as Telfer pulled his sedan in to the curb ahead, beneath a spasmodic neon: *The Lighthouse*. "Don't worry, Lieutenant," Goldweiss said. "The boys'll get where he hid it out of him, after they've talked to him a while in the back room."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

Koski left the radio-car officer trying to figure it out, glanced in through the *Lighthouse* door. Cale was making for a booth halfway down the gloomy tunnel of the dimly-lighted grille. The girl in the booth was Patty Rondo. Beside the row of booths was a long bar with a dozen idlers ranged against it.

Koski went in. There was no time for caution. If it had been the girl who'd phoned Bill's father to come here, it meant the fireworks might start suddenly.

They'd already begun when Koski slid into the next empty booth. He couldn't see either of them. The backs of the booths extended nearly up to the low ceiling. But he could hear.

Patty was in a cold rage. "You rotten, double-crossing fink!"

"I'm not denying anything," Cale answered in a curiously flat, toneless voice.

"He's dead! You killed him!"

"I wish I could say it wasn't true." The old man's words came slowly, as if he was weighing each one carefully. "But it is."

"If it wasn't for your filthy two-timing, we'd be away on our honeymoon

now. What'd you do with the money?"

"I put it out of your reach, Patty." Cale seemed to be explaining something to a dull-witted child. "I never meant you to get your hands on it, you know. Any more than I intended you should get your claws into Bill."

"Bill's safe enough from me, at any rate." She gave a sinister little laugh. "But if you think I'm not going to get that money, you've got another—"

"No, Patty. When you told me on the phone I'd better bring you something, or I'd be sorry, I knew what you meant, all right. So I did bring you something."

Koski took three fast steps on the balls of his feet then. He had his hand on the barrel of Cale's nickel-plated gun, pressing its muzzle down toward the beer mats on the table, before the old man stared up at him, thunder-struck.

Patty was quicker. She started to slither past the table, out of the booth.

KOSKI pushed her back, crowded in beside her, taking the gun away from Cale with no trouble.

"Hands on the table. Both of you. That's right. Keep 'em there. Let's put a few cards on the table, too, hah?"

Cale seemed too frozen with fear to open his mouth.

Patty sneered at him. "Can't make a move without yawping copper, can you, *murderer!* Have to ring the blues in on everything—even your own son's killing!"

The old man went deathly pale, leaned against the back of the booth, gasping.

"You've got him wrong, Miss Rondo." Koski wondered why the near-gunplay hadn't caused more commotion among the men at the bar. No one seemed to be watching them with any special interest. "Mister Telfer didn't call the police in on this. He didn't know I'd trailed him here. I expect he wouldn't have liked it anymore'n you do."

"Me?" She laughed, hysterically. "I'm glad you're here! You must have heard him admit—what he's done."

"Yeah." Now, out of the corner of his eye, Koski did catch a furtive movement of the loungers at the bar. He crowded against the girl so she wouldn't

be able to hamper his gun hand. "Mister Telfer admitted being in on a bad deal, all right. But it was a deal you cooked up."

The group at the bar was splitting—three or four sidling and shuffling toward the booth to distract his attention, the others sneaking up behind him.

"You hooked the boy—a kid who never wised up to your kind. You got him to the marry-me stage, and when his father came around to break it up, you offered to give the boy the gate—if you got paid enough."

The old man stared at him, awed. "I did. Yes. She wanted more than I could pay."

Koski stood up abruptly, the nickel-plated gun in his left hand, his right hand in the gun pocket of his Melton. He swivelled around, facing the three who'd idled up within a few feet of the booth behind him.

He said, "Something, boys?" They found business of pressing interest back at the bar, moved back hastily.

"She told you how you could get the dough for her, I expect, Mister Telfer." Koski spoke to the old man, but watched the girl. She was staring at someone standing behind the garish jukebox. The lieutenant could only make out a shadowy figure, there.

"He's a liar, if he told you I framed that holdup, copper," Patty cried scornfully. "It was Cale Telfer's own idea. He told Eddie when to run the boat in an' tie up, when the door would be unlocked—"

"That is true." The old man struggled to his feet, in spite of Koski's warning gesture with the gun. "But I had no intention—"

"No!" snarled Patty. "You'd no intention of bein' on the up an' up with Eddie, after you rigged the holdup with him. You held out the money, tipped off the guards, got Eddie killed—"

"How'd you know he was dead, Miss Rondo?" Koski shoved Cale back into his seat. The old man had blocked the lieutenant's line of vision so he lost sight of that shadowy figure momentarily.

The girl didn't answer.

The answer came, close to Koski's ear. Close enough so he felt the cold

bluntness of the automatic's nose before he heard the familiar nasal whine of Doojey Felch, saw the thin, wolfish face with the broken yellow teeth.

"I told her, Koski. I seen him die. I seen you kill him over there at Gowanus. It'd serve you right if Patty took that gun away from you right now an' pushed the button on you. Patty was Eddie's girl, Koski. They was goin' on a honeymoon if you hadn't lucked onto us out there in the Bay. If Patty was to grab your gun now and it was to go off—"

"If that was to happen, Doojey," the heavy rumbling voice of Joe Mulcahey announced with matter-of-fact authority, "the first thing she'd have to do would be to comb your brains out of her hair! Stick your thumbs in your ears! In your ears, I said! Where I can see 'em! An' keep 'em there!"

THEY waited on the sidewalk for the patrol wagon. Doojey Felch and Patty Rondo, handcuffed together, were facing the wall and leaning against it with their hands against the wet brick to keep them from falling. Steve Koski and Joe Mulcahey were watching the fog condense in rivulets, thick as mineral oil, on the windows of the cafe.

"I thought I told you to watch Negus and not let him off the oyster boat, you thick-skulled Hibernian!"

"He's still there, Steve. I only came over here to show you the note he found in his pocket, whilst we was givin' the pilot-house the up an' down. Old Cale Telfer must have stuck it in there, unbeknownst, that time we were all millin' around looking at those bloodstains on the deck."

He gave Koski a slip torn from a Shoalwater Seafood's memorandum pad:

Win—

The money's in the lower right-hand drawer of my desk. I never meant it to get anywhere but in the firm's bank account. I thought I was doing what was best for Bill, to go along with the holdup scheme and so get that witch out of the way. But what I did was send Bill to his death. So I can't see any use to go on living myself. I'll try to balance the books before I go.

Cale.

"Yeah," Koski nodded. "This fits. Cale agreed to her scheme for a stick-up, but he was too honest to let his partner, or even the insurance people, share a loss like that. So he fixed up that dummy bag, gave it to his son—"

"Not expectin' any shootin' to come out of it," Mulcahey made it more a statement than a question.

"She'd have promised there'd be no violence. But the armored truck guard spoiled that. He shot first and got Eddie. Eddie knew he was in bad shape, and he blasted away like a maniac, wounded the guard, killed the boy. So, instead of putting Patty and her pals in wrong on account of a holdup that wouldn't have netted them a nickel, old Telfer unintentionally had planned his own son's funeral."

The sergeant wiped moisture off the barrel of his Police Positive. "This Negus, now. He's no dope. I don't say he had it figured out, all neat like that, Steve. But he knew his partner was mixed up in it some way."

"He was trying to cover up for him. Yeah. I caught onto that, after a bit." Koski heard the clanging of the police van down the block. "But how'd you catch on to my being at the *Light-house*?"

"Negus went to Cale's desk, after he read the note. He found the old man'd taken his gun. He knew the only person he'd be likely to want to kill was this—Patty person. So he told me where I'd find her. I knew I'd find you here."

"You're so smart, you bulls!" Doojey snarled. "How'd you know where Telfer went, Koski?"

Mulcahey hummed softly,

Me... an' my sha-a-dow

Walkin' down the av-e-nue...

He broke off as the 'wagon' clanged to a stop. "You s'pose the Commissioner'd object if we was to appear as *shadows*, in the background of the pix they'll be takin' of these two?"

"Ah, who wants publicity, anyway?!" asked Steve Koski.

"The Commissioner," sighed Joe Mulcahey.

By MYRON
DAVID
ORR



"Can you follow Crampton without being seen?" McCann whispered to Nova

*Archie McCann sees through a
killer's trick — and proves he
knows a trick or two himself!*

THE GUN WAS LOST

ARCHIBALD SYLVESTER Brewster McCann listened with interest as his friend, Jason French, told about the murder of Serge Cogganov. French was Chief of Police of Port Moresby, New Guinea and Native Commissioner of the Territory of Papua.

The hot noon day sun streamed down through the cocoanut palms in the native village of Tambu, just north of Port Moresby. Waves of humid, sickish smelling air came rolling out of the jungle and enveloped McCann and French in a pocket of stifling heat. They were sitting in front of McCann's

shack, fanning themselves with palm fans.

"How in the devil can you stand it?" asked French wearily.

"It isn't as hot as Port Moresby," said McCann as he slapped a mosquito on his knee. "And I like it here."

"I'll take my air-conditioned office any time," said French. "You can stay up here and get malaria and hook-worm if you want to, but thank God I have brains enough to remain civilized."

"I notice that you always come to me when you get in a mess in which a native is involved," McCann said with a grin. "Tabi is one of your own police boys. You ought to know all about him. If he killed Cogganov, you should be able to make him admit it."

"How in the devil can I make him admit it when I can't find him," snapped French. "He had ten days leave to go home. He got in a row with Cogganov and killed him, then vanished."

"And I suppose you want me to smell him out of the jungle," said McCann.

"I don't care how you find him," said French. "I know you can do it."

"You certainly are a persistent cuss," said McCann as he unlimbered himself and rose to his full angular height of six and a half feet. "You are also presumptuous. I'm not going to get mixed up in any more of your native troubles. Just because I helped you out in the Peters murder, you think you can call on me anytime anything happens up here in the bush."

"This case is different," said French. "It involves one of my own police boys. Juan Nova, Cogganov's partner, has made the charge against Tabi that he killed Cogganov. I've got to get to the bottom of it or lose face with the natives and get in bad with the brass hats."

McCann scratched his nose thoughtfully. "You said that you have been out to the Cogganov ranch?" he asked.

"I not only went out to the ranch but I rounded up all the firearms and had ballistic tests made in order to eliminate the possibility that some one other than Tabi did it?"

McCann glanced at French. "And you came to the conclusion that Tabi did it?"

"I did."

"All right," said McCann. "I'll help you find Tabi."

YEARs before Archibald Sylvester Brewster McCann, anthropologist to his friends, beach-comber to his critics, undercover agent to the British Intelligence of New Guinea and good fella massa to the natives, had decided to be a doctor. After graduating from medical school, he found that the duties of a doctor were much too onerous for his indolent nature. He decided that law might be better. So he qualified as a lawyer. However he soon found that a lawyer's life was a continual round of mental disturbances and unnecessary chin exercise. What he wanted was a job that required the minimum amount of both physical and mental exercise and exertion.

After a careful review of all the possible occupations demanding the least amount of physical and mental exertion, he concluded that the life of an anthropologist in the South Seas would be ideal.

He bought a second-hand book on anthropology, skimmed through it in one evening, then called on the director of an expedition that was about to depart for the Bismark Archipelago in the Pacific. McCann proceeded to dumbfound the director with an unintelligible jumble of technical-sounding, spontaneously coined words. Much to his surprise he landed a job with the expedition.

McCann had built himself a crude shack in the native village of Tambu. He won the confidence of the natives. He aroused the alarm of the anthropologists. They feared that he was going native on account of the fact that he lived the life of the natives and was accepted into their secret functions held in the forbidden temple of the men—the Haus Tambarin.

During World War II, he and Jason French had become inseparable friends. They had worked together on many subversive matters sponsored by the enemy among the natives of the Papu district of New Guinea. Now after five years as an active undercover agent for the British, he was back in the village of

Tambu, ready to resume his chosen life work. However, French insisted upon invading his privacy whenever trouble arose in the bush country. Because he liked French, he always was ready to help him even though it meant a disruption of his routine of indolence.

McCann and French soon arrived at the Cogganov plantation which was only a short distance from Tambu. They went directly to Cogganov's house. Here they found Nyamu, Cogganov's house-boy gossiping with several of the plantation workers. The workers made a quick exit when they saw French. Nyamu faced McCann expectantly.

"Hello, Nyamu," said McCann. "Massa French and I want to talk to you about Massa Cogganov."

Nyamu glanced at French. "Nyamu no talk now," he said. "Tongue belong Nyamu plenty much sick."

"That's what I mean," said French disgustedly. "They won't talk to me. They're afraid of me."

McCann grinned. "Wait outside," said McCann. "I'll see if he knows anything."

French shrugged his shoulders and went outside.

"Mebbe Nyamu tell Massa Macan now?" smiled McCann.

Nyamu went to the door and saw that French had gone over toward a small shed across the yard clearing. He turned and faced McCann. "Nyamu talk now," he said simply.

"Nyamu savvy man who killed Massa Cogganov?" McCann asked.

"No. Massa Macan."

"Nyamu tell all about what Nyamu knows," said McCann.

"Nyamu work here in kitchen," began Nyamu slowly. "Nyamu hear one shot. Nyamu stop work—listen—listen—listen. No hear nothing. Nyamu work again. Ten, mebbe fifteen minute more, Nyamu hear bang, bang, bang, bang, bang—five shots plenty quick. All boys belong dis place come and say, 'What happen?' Nyamu no know. Nyamu ask boys where come shot. Boys say up trail. Nyamu and boys all go up trail into bush. Nyamu find Massa Cogganov in bush plenty much finish. Massa Cogganov him dead. Him on trail. Nyamu run, run, run back to house.

Nyamu hunt Massa Nova. Nyamu no find Massa Nova. By-and-by Nyamu see Massa Nova coming out of trail from Port Moresby. Nyamu tell Massa Nova, Massa Cogganov killed. Massa Nova run, run, run ketchem Massa Cogganov and fetch Massa Cogganov back dis place. Thass all."

"Where's Massa Nova now?" asked McCann.

"Right here," said a voice outside the kitchen door and Nova entered.

NOVA was a thin dark-faced man with a very bright black eyes.

"Oh, hello, Nova," said McCann with a smile. "Haven't seen you since we drew up those partnership papers for Cogganov and you last month."

"I didn't expect a termination of our partnership like this," said Nova.

"Chief French and I came up to look over the murder," said McCann.

"French?" said Nova as he glanced around the room.

"Yes," said McCann, "I'll call him. He's outside."

McCann called French back to the house.

"Sorry to trouble you again, Nova," said French as he entered and saw Nova, "but McCann wanted to look over the ground. He's going to help me locate my police boy."

"Mr. McCann is always welcome," said Nova. "I'll do anything I can to assist. Will you fellows have a drink?"

"Never touch the stuff," said McCann with a grimace.

"Any ice for it?" asked French.

"Not a bit," said Nova. "Sorry."

"I won't have any either," said French.

"I was just telling Nova that it was a lucky thing for him that I had drawn up a partnership agreement for him and Cogganov," McCann informed French. "Nova bought into Cogganov's holdings. I didn't say anything at the time but now that Cogganov's dead, I can tell you that I felt he paid too much for his half. I think you paid every cent the place is worth," he told Nova.

"I didn't know that," said French. "I thought that you were only Cogganov's foreman."

"I've been his foreman for ten years," said Nova. "Last month I inherited a bit of money and thought I'd like to buy into the plantation. It makes money you know."

"Have you any idea who might have killed Cogganov other than Tabi?" asked McCann.

Nova looked thoughtful. "Well, there is another angle," he began slowly, "but I don't know just how to figure it out."

"Tell me and maybe I can help you," suggested McCann.

"Well, I have my ideas in the matter—as I've told Chief French," said Nova.

"Tell him everything you told me," said French. "It's better hearing it first hand."

"Well, I hate to talk about the dead," said Nova, "but Cogganov was quite free with the natives—I mean the women. He is credited with having quite a few children, even though he's a bachelor. Of course he always pays the father of the girl and sees that the family has plenty of food. That generally keeps the natives satisfied. I guess he's paid for children who aren't actually his."

McCann waited for him to continue. Nova started walking back and forth across the floor. He finally stopped in front of McCann.

"About a month ago he picked out a girl that belonged to Jake Crampton," he went on. "You know Crampton? He's got the ranch adjoining ours on the north. Well, Crampton came roaring down here like a mad bull. Cogganov went out to meet him. They started shouting at each other and threatening each other. They finally ended up in one of the worst fights I ever saw. I finally got Cogganov into the house and talked Crampton into going back home."

"Why didn't you tell me that?" demanded French.

"I didn't think it had any bearing on the murder," said Nova. "Crampton and Cogganov have fought like that ever since I've been working here. They always had differences."

"Over women?" asked McCann.

"This was the first time over women," said Nova. "I got to thinking about it. You see Crampton is very vain and proud of his personal affairs with women. He probably got to brooding over

Cogganov taking his woman away from him. You know sometimes men do things when a woman is involved that they wouldn't do under other circumstances."

"But you told me you were practically sure that Tabi killed Cogganov," said French.

McCANN had been listening intently to Nova. Now he nodded slowly.

"Tell me about Tabi," said McCann.

"As I said before," continued Nova, "Cogganov was quite a man for different women. About a month ago, he got a young girl in trouble. This girl was Tabi's girl. They were going to be married. Tabi came back and found out what had happened. He was wild—a regular madman. He attacked Cogganov with a knife, but Cogganov knocked the knife out of his hand. Then they had a terrible fight."

"That's funny," said McCann. "I never knew of a native striking a white man."

"He was crazy," said Nova. "He didn't know what he was doing. Cogganov was choking him. I was afraid that he would kill Tabi. I pulled him off Tabi and sent Tabi home. Tabi looked like a wild man and shouted that he would kill Cogganov the first chance he got. I finally persuaded him to go home, but he was still mad."

McCann turned to French. "You said that Cogganov was killed with a forty-five?" he asked.

"That's right."

"Does Tabi have a forty-five?"

"He has one when he is on duty," said French. "But as I told you, for some reason or other he took his gun with him when he went on leave. That is strictly against orders."

"Have you any ballistic record of his gun?" asked McCann.

"None. No reason to make one."

"It would help to convict or eliminate him as a suspect if you had," said McCann. "The way it looks now, we'll have to make a search of Crampton's place and confiscate all of his guns."

"I never did trust that Crampton," said French. "Remember Mac, how we always suspected that he was a German?"

"He's a chip off the kraut block," agreed McCann, "but he kept his mouth shut. He didn't do anything that we knew about."

"I don't think Crampton is his right name," said Nova.

"We don't either," said French.

"I'd like to see the place where Cogganov was killed," said McCann.

"I'll show you," said Nova.

Nova led them into the dense jungle back of the plantation along a narrow trail that wound in and out of the tangled undergrowth and giant tropical trees. About forty rods in the jungle they came into an opening in the jungle. The hard packed earth of the trail was a reddish gray line that bisected the opening and then plunged into a group of tall eucalyptus trees on the opposite side.

"Where does this trail go?" asked McCann.

"It goes up to a small native village the other side of the Crampton plantation," said Nova.

"Does Crampton use this trail?" asked McCann.

"His men do, but Crampton goes out of the bush through your village of Tambu," said Nova.

"Looks as though an army had passed through here," observed McCann as he pointed to shoe marks on the trail.

"Those are the marks we made when we came down here," said French.

The three men crossed the opening and entered the eucalyptus grove. The tall smooth barked tree towered high above the matted jungle growth through which the trail wound. About ten rods in the grove, Nova stopped and pointed to the ground.

"This is where I found Cogganov," he said.

McCann could see evidence of the tragedy along the sides of the trail and on the trail itself. Jungle growth was broken down and the earth was roughed up by many foot prints.

"I suppose these shoe prints were made by you and the other people who mused up all the clues," said McCann as he glanced at French disgustedly.

"I looked for clues before I let the men come in," said French. "There weren't any clues."

McCann looked up and down the trail. The huge trunks of the eucalyptus trees effectively blocked a direct view of the winding trail. No more than a hundred feet could be seen either way.

Nova moved on up the trail.

"Whoever shot Cogganov," said McCann to French in a low voice, "used six shots according to Nyamu. There was only one bullet in Cogganov's body. Five therefore must have gone wild. Some of those wild bullets must have hit the tree trunks. A man couldn't fire five bullets through these trees without hitting one of them. Don't let Nova see you examining the tree trunks, but keep your eyes open. See if there are any bullet marks on the trunks. We'll follow Nova and then we'll go back the other way."

BUT the Police Chief saw a difficulty. "We don't know which way Cogganov was walking when he was shot in the back," said French.

"That's right," said McCann. "We'll line up the trees both ways and look them over. Ah, here comes Nova!"

"Do you think he knows more than he's telling?" asked French.

McCann was unable to reply to French's question as Nova was within hearing distance.

"By the way, Nova," said McCann as Nova returned, "did you hear the shots that were fired?"

"No, I didn't," said Nova. "I was too far away. I was coming up the trail from Port Moresby. The wind was blowing in the wrong direction for me to hear."

"Nyamu said that there were six shots," said McCann.

Nova seemed surprised. "Six shots?" he said with a slight frown.

"That's right," said McCann. "A single shot and then five more about fifteen minutes later."

Nova was puzzled. "Nyamu never told me that," he said thoughtfully.

A man's cough sounded through the jungle's stillness. The three men turned and faced toward the upper trail. They could hear someone coming down the trail. His coughing sounded nearer.

McCann glanced around and located a small opening in the dense jungle un-

dergrowth at the side of the trail. He motioned for French and Nova to follow him. McCann pulled aside the large fronds of a giant fern that hid the opening and again motioned for French and Nova to enter. McCann followed them in and then quickly adjusted the huge leaves back across the opening. They were completely hidden from the view of anyone on the trail.

The heavy footsteps of the man could now be heard distinctly thudding along the path. He was still coughing and breathing heavily as he stepped into sight of the three men hiding behind the fern fronds.

It was Crampton, the giant-framed German whose plantation adjoined Cogganov's to the north. His hands were big and powerful. His head was bullet shaped and close shaven. A sun helmet shaded it from the sun. Beady pig-like eyes glittered between baggy rolls of fat that served as eyelids as he inspected the place where Cogganov had been shot.

Crampton spent about a minute looking over the ground and then passed on down the trail.

McCann whispered to Nova: "Can you follow him without being seen?"

"I'll try," said Nova.

"Find out what he's up to," said McCann. "And don't let him see you. If he does, just pass it off. You are on your own land, you know."

"He won't see me," said Nova confidently as he stepped quietly out on the trail. "I can get around in the bush!"

"We'll meet you back at the house," said McCann. "We'll wait for you."

After Nova had disappeared down the trail, McCann turned to French. "Keep your eye on the lower trail while I take a look up this way," he said.

McCann inspected all the tree trunks along the trail for bullet marks. None were found. He came back to French.

"Let's look over the tree trunks down this way," he said. "There aren't any marks on the trunks up the trail. Also keep a sharp lookout for anyone coming up the trail."

"Do you remember that Nova said that he got along with Crampton," said French. "I'm wondering if there might be any connection between them."

"I doubt it," said McCann.

"This Crampton angle was apparently an afterthought," said French.

"Anybody might have an afterthought," said McCann as his eyes searched the tree trunks.

SUDDENLY he stopped and glanced down at the ground. A small bright object lying between the huge sprawling roots of a sour plum tree (emu apple) had caught his attention. He stooped down and picked it up. It was an exploded brass cartridge of a forty-five automatic pistol. He poked into the debris around the roots of the tree and found four more exploded cartridges. He held them out for French's inspection.

"Forty-fives," said French. "By George, it's funny I didn't see them when I was up here."

"Humph," grunted McCann.

"How do you suppose they got there?" asked French.

"Nyamu said that he heard five shots about fifteen minutes after he heard the first shot," said McCann. "Five shots—five shells! U-mmm!"

"These trees are so close together and the trail is so winding that anyone shooting in here would certainly hit one of the trees," said French as he began to examine the nearby trunks with minute care. "A person couldn't miss."

"We've got to make a thorough search for bullet marks," said McCann. "We'll start both ways from this point."

After nearly an hour of intense and careful search and inspection, not a single bullet mark could be found.

"Come on, Jack," he said. "Let's go back to the house."

Nova was not at the house when they arrived. Nyamu said that he had been there a short time ago but that he had left without saying where he was going.

"We've got to get down to Port Moresby," said McCann. "I want to check the firing-pins of your arsenal collection."

"Arsenal collection?" said French in surprise.

"Yeah. The guns you rounded up from the ranch here and whatever guns might be available that the police boys use."

When they arrived at the Police Headquarters in Port Moresby, they went immediately to French's office. Sergeant Johnson, French's assistant came into the office.

"We've got Tabi," he said.

"Has he confessed?" asked French quickly.

"Not yet," said Johnson grimly, "but he will. The boys are working on him."

"What about his gun?" asked French.

"He had his gun with him," said Johnson. "But it wasn't the gun he used to kill Cogganov. We tested it out. He must have used another gun."

"Where is he now?" asked McCann.

Johnson made a slight movement with his head toward the door. "The boys are still interviewing him," he said grimly.

"You won't get any place that way," said McCann. "I'll talk to him after your boys get through. That's if he's still all in one piece."

"We don't mistreat our prisoners," said French. "We only talk to them."

"I know how you talk to them," said McCann. "By hand, isn't it?"

"That's the only way they understand," said French.

"Baloney," said McCann and dropped the five shells on French's desk. "Have one of your men make a comparison of all the firing pin marks with the marks on these shells."

French indicated with his head that Johnson should do so. Johnson picked up the shells and left the room.

"Where do you keep this arsenal?" asked McCann.

Johnson walked over to a steel cabinet and unlocked the heavy door. "In here," he said.

McCann inspected the array of guns. "There are only two forty-fives," he said as he picked them up and looked at them.

"That's right," said French, "and there's the forty-five that Tabi has. That makes three now."

"Who do these two belong to?" asked McCann.

"One belongs to Nova and the other is Cogganov's."

"Of course Crampton's gun hasn't been inspected," said McCann. "You'll have to get that one for your collection. Better sneak up on Crampton and grab

his guns before he can hide them."

"We've got to be careful whom we arrest," said French. "The old man has been raising the devil the last few weeks about false arrest and all that old stuff. It isn't like the old days during the war. We have to watch our step these days."

McCann sat down at French's desk and placed the automatics in front of him.

He held up one. "Whose gun is this?" he asked.

French looked at it. "That's Nova's," he said.

McCann racked the slide back and glanced into the chamber. "And you say none of these guns have the same rifling marks as the bullet you got out of Cogganov?"

"That's right."

Suddenly McCann became interested in the end of the barrel. The bluing had not been worn off, neither did the muzzle show the wear that the rest of the gun showed. "Come on French," said McCann quietly, "We're going to fire a bullet from this gun."

"But we've already done that," said French. "The rifling doesn't match."

"I'm interested in firing-pins marks," said McCann as he opened the door and walked down to the laboratory.

Comparison of the firing pin marks on the shells McCann had found with the test shell fired in the laboratory showed the marks to be identical.

"You can arrest Nova for the murder of Cagganov," said McCann quietly.

"But—," began French.

"Do as I say," said McCann abruptly. "I'll take the responsibility for his arrest. I'll sign the complaint if you want me to. Just arrest him and I'll be back here within twenty-four hours with the proof."

"Let's hope you can!" French said fervently.

"Hold on to that gun," said McCann. "It was the one that killed Cogganov."

McCann arrived back in French's office exactly twenty-four hours later. French was quite worried.

"I hope you know what you're doing," he greeted McCann. "Nova's been kicking up a row ever since we arrested him yesterday. He's demanding counsel and

is threatening to sue me for false arrest."

"Let me have Nova's gun and the five cartridges that I gave you yesterday," said McCann with an easy grin that spread across his thin face. "Don't worry about Nova. I'll handle him."

French brought out the gun and the five shells and gave them to McCann.

"Got any live ammunition for this gun?" McCann asked.

"What do you want live ammunition for?" asked French.

"I want to fill this clip," said McCann as he released the clip and pulled back the slide and locked it.

French went to the safe and brought back a box of ammunition. McCann filled the clip. "Bring Nova in," he said.

"What are you going to do—scare him into telling that he killed Cogganov?" said French.

"I might!" McCann grinned as he took French's chair behind the desk. "Bring him in. I want to talk to him."

"Okay," said French gloomily. "But you'd better have something to talk about when I bring him in."

While French was out of the room, McCann removed the firing pin. When he returned with Nova, McCann was reclining back in the chair with his eyes closed.

"What the big idea of having me arrested?" demanded Nova as he saw McCann. "You'd better let me go or I'll make it so hot for you two Hitlers that you'll wish you never saw me."

"Sit down, Mr. Nova," said McCann quietly.

"I'll stand, thank you," snapped Nova. McCann rose to his full height. His eyes bored into Nova's.

"You will sit down, Mr. Nova," he repeated quietly.

Nova slid into a chair in front of the desk. McCann sat down again in his chair behind the desk. They faced each other across the desk. McCann reached into the desk drawer and brought out the five cartridges. With a slow and deliberate movement he placed the five cartridges upright in a straight line on the edge of the desk in front of Nova. He kept his eyes leveled on Nova's all the time. He didn't say a word. The five shells stood like a tiny picket fence be-

tween him and Nova—evenly spaced and significant.

"That's quite a nice sour plum tree you have up there on the trail into the eucalyptus grove," said McCann with a peculiar tone in his voice.

NOVA'S eyes were narrowed but there was no movement of his face.

"I was down to the bank this morning cashing a check, Mr. Nova," said McCann. "They showed me a very interesting paper."

Nova gave no indication that he heard McCann's statement.

"It was a draft that you had made on your bank in Madrid in payment of the partnership with Cogganov, Mr. Nova," continued McCann evenly. "It was returned and marked, *No funds.*"

Nova's swarthy face began to look whiter. McCann noticed that he was gripping the arms of his chair tightly.

"The draft got back quicker than you expected, didn't it Nova?" said McCann. "They sent it airmail instead of through the regular channels."

Nova's eyes were bright. His mouth was set in a thin straight line, but he didn't answer.

"How did you expect to cover it, Mr. Nova," asked McCann. "Did you think, with Cogganov dead, you could pass it over if you had control of the Cogganov bank account here in Port Moresby?"

McCann turned to French. "I forgot to tell you, Jack, that there was a provision in the partnership agreement that gave the entire holding of the partnership to the survivor. Mr. Nova wasn't smart. He should have known better than to do a thing like that."

"All right," snapped Nova. "I admit that I thought that I could juggle the bank account. I've always handled the books for him. He didn't know anything about bookkeeping. But that doesn't make me the murderer."

McCann reached into the desk drawer and brought out the pistol. He placed it on the desk in front of Nova just back of the row of upright shells.

"Ever see this pistol before?" he asked Nova.

"Certainly," said Nova. "It's mine."

"How long have you owned it?"

"About two years."

"All of it two years?"

"What do you mean?" asked Nova quickly.

McCann reached into his pocket and brought out an automatic pistol barrel. He placed it on the desk beside the pistol without comment. He looked directly into Nova's eyes.

"How far was Cogganov ahead of you when he was shot?" asked McCann.

Nova's eyes narrowed. He glanced down at the gun.

"Do you know where I found these five empty cartridges, Mr. Nova," McCann asked. "I found them right beside the sour plum tree in the eucalyptus grove. We made a test firing with your gun and the firing pin marks are the same on these five shells and the test shell."

The jugular vein in Nova's neck began to expand and contract rapidly. His breathing became faster. His voice was well controlled as he said:

"I was out shooting a few days ago and I stood beside that tree and shot at a deer."

"Was the deer on the trail, Mr. Nova?" asked McCann.

"It was."

"I suppose every one of your bullets hit the deer," interposed French.

"Oh, no, I don't think I hit him. He was too far away. And besides he was running."

"Mr. McCann and I examined all of the tree trunks in that vicinity and we found no bullet marks on any of them."

Nova made no effort to answer. He only glared at McCann.

McCann picked up the pistol barrel.

"Here is a pistol barrel, Mr. Nova," he said. "Take it. I want you to remove the present barrel that is in your pistol here on the desk, and put this one in. It will fit. I tried it."

McCann noticed that Nova's ears moved slightly as he took the barrel. He hesitated for a moment.

"Go ahead, Mr. Nova," urged McCann. "Change the barrels."

SLOWLY Nova laid the barrel on the desk and picked up the pistol. He pulled the slide rearward. A live cartridge slipped up into position from the magazine. Nova tensed for a moment, then released the slide and let the shell slip into the barrel of the gun. He was on his feet instantaneously and had both French and McCann covered.

"Don't move, either of you or I'll blast the daylights outta you," he ordered huskily as he fanned the gun back and forth between McCann and French. He started to back toward the door. McCann made a quick move and blocked his exit. Nova hesitated and then started for an open window.

"Put down that gun, Nova," ordered McCann as he started for him.

"Stay where you are!" snarled Nova.

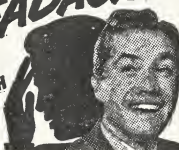
McCann continued to advance. Nova pulled the trigger. There was only the click of the hammer. Nova racked another shell into the barrel and again pulled the trigger. There was another click as McCann's long arm flashed out like a sledge hammer and his closed fist connected with Nova's chin.

Nova went down. French was upon

(Continued on page 94)

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Lacey plays it the way
he figures it should be
played

KILL ME NEXT TIME

*When Private Eye Lacey collects a big, fat fee,
he doesn't mind throwing in a small corpse or so!*

HE CAME into the office, kicked the door shut, and then stood there giving me the sharp eye. I gave it right back to him, and saw an old duck who was probably crowding seventy, but with a certain something about him that said, "Beware, Dynamite."

"You Chet Lacey?" he suddenly snapped.

"Right," I nodded. "And you?"

He grunted, walked over and plunked his six-foot-two in my client's chair on the other side of the desk.

"Like your looks, Lacey," he said. "So I'm hiring you. Here's a thousand

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

for a retainer. A five thousand bonus when you complete the job."

Ten wonderful new century notes flopped down on my desk blotter, but I didn't touch them. I didn't even look at them—except for a split second. I just looked at him.

"Fine!" I said with an edge to my voice. "But there's a catch. I'm not for hire. Who the devil are you?"

"The name is George B. Taylor," he barked. "And why the devil aren't you for hire?"

Right then and there the Lacey brain got back on the track. I'll hedge a little by saying that my visitor's lean age- and weather-washed face did look a bit familiar. It should have, because I'd only seen his picture in the papers about two or three hundred times!

George B. Taylor? Well, take a man as crazy as a coot, and add one as sharp as a new buggy whip. Add to that a gent who has done everything in life from making a walking tour around Africa to opening a ship's safe a hundred feet under New York Harbor. Then add a lad with about five or six million dollars. Stir them all together and the result will be—George B. Taylor.

"Now that I know your name, sir," I said with a grin, "maybe I could change my mind. Just what do you want me to do?"

"Find out who wants to kill me," he said, and almost shook his head off his thin neck for emphasis.

"Suspect anyone?" I murmured.

"Every blasted son of a son who wants to marry my granddaughter!" he fired it at me. "And Heaven knows how many of them there are!"

I TOOK a nine count on that one, just to check I wasn't having a goofy dream. But that grand on my desk was real!

"Why them?" I finally asked.

Before replying, he hitched his chair around, so that he faced me squarely. And, brother, he had a pair of eyes that could light a cigarette at twenty yards!

"My granddaughter, Alice Taylor, is my only living relative," he said. "At least the only one I care a hoot about. She's lived with me five years now. Ever since her father, mother, and two broth-

ers were killed in a plane crash. Well, when I die, everything goes to Alice. Until then, she has a very satisfactory allowance. However,, if she marries someone I don't like, she'll be cut off without a cent!"

"So?" I encouraged when he ran out of words.

"Obvious!" he rapped out. "Somebody who knows I don't like him wants me out of the way so that he can marry Alice. It's as plain as that nose on your face!"

But for that grand on the blotter, and his age, I would have made something out of that crack.

"Not quite," I said evenly. "Do you have proof some unknown Lochinvar wants you out?"

"I've had it twice! he grated. "Four nights ago a car overtook the one I was driving alone down the Mountain View Trail, and came within an eyelash of forcing me over a seven hundred foot drop. And last night, as I was retiring, somebody out on the grounds took a rifle shot at me through the window. There's the bullet I dug out of my bedroom wall. Missed my head by less than an inch."

As he spoke, he fished in his vest pocket, and tossed a forty-forty bullet on my blotter. I just eyed it to make sure, and let it lay.

"Just who knows of the conditions of your will, sir?" I naturally asked next.

"Everybody!" he said, and snorted. "I've made no secret of them for a purpose. I mean to keep all blasted fortune hunters away from my granddaughter's door. She's—well, she's of age, but that's about all. She's got some of my blood in her, I guess. Know what I mean?"

If I didn't, I could guess close enough. Anyway, I looked down at those ten centuries and wondered if I needed them as badly as I did. I decided I did.

"All right, I'll take the case," I said. "But—and mind this—I don't promise a thing. Now, have you told your granddaughter of these two attempts on your life?"

"Certainly! And she tell's me I'm just imagining things. And that's another reason I'm hiring you, Lacey. My granddaughter. Something funny about that girl. She's been acting different lately, but nothing you can put your finger on.

Look, here's what I want you to do."

I checked the temptation to tell him I always decided what I'd do on a case, and waited.

"Come out to my place tomorrow and spend the weekend," he finally said.

"There's always a houseful weekends, and one more won't be noticed. Alice's friends will be there, and you can get to know them. Well, sort of nose around and find out who's closest in the running. That will be your man—perhaps. Anyway, you'll get to know them all. Start from there, so to speak. Take the twelve noon to Ellwood. A car will meet you at the station. Oh yes, better bring golf clubs, swim trunks, tennis racket, and such. You like sports?"

"I love sports," I said, and failed to add—indoor.

"Good," he bit off, and stood up. "See you tomorrow then. And I want action, as fast as you can make it, Lacey!"

"You'll get it," I replied. Then added. "If there's anything to be found."

STABBING me for a second with those eyes, he mulled it over, I guess. Then he grunted, nodded, and went out. A couple of moments later I picked up the ten centuries and stuffed them in my wallet—with pretty much the same guilty feeling I had that day I snatched seven pennies out of my kid brother's piggy bank. But thinking of spending a weekend at Ellwood Crest soon drove away that perturbing feeling. You've never heard of Ellwood Crest? Then, brother, I guess you've never heard of Buckingham Palace, either!

Anyway, I was thinking beautiful thoughts when the door opened again and a street urchin walked in.

"Is your name Lacey?" he asked through lips that didn't move. And when I nodded, "Then this is for you."

"This" was a sealed white envelope that scaled through the air at me. I caught it, but before I could open my mouth the kid was out the door and gone. Maybe I should have ducked out after him, but did you ever try to catch a tough street kid who didn't want to be caught? So I sat where I was and slit open the envelope. Inside was a single sheet of paper. On it, somebody had printed in pencil:

If you're smart, you'll forget about old man Taylor, beginning with now!

Just like that. So, who was a crackpot now? George B. Taylor with his screwy case? Me for taking it? Or some unknown chump who thought I'd drop it because he said to? Okay, all three of us, if you like. Anyway, I stuck the note back in the envelope, stuck the envelope into the desk drawer, and then closed up shop and went to the bank.

The next day was one of those you dream about but seldom see in our neck of the woods. I'll just say, perfect, and leave it at that. And the train ride to Ellwood was just long enough for one to shake off city thoughts, and get all countrified, if you know what I mean. No less than fifty or sixty cars were at the Ellwood station, but I had no trouble finding the one Taylor had sent down. It was a modest little five thousand dollar station wagon with "Ellwood Crest" done in fancy gold lettering on the door panels.

A lad in livery asked me if I was Mr. Lacey, and took my single bag when I said I was, and opened one of the doors. I climbed in and off we went like something jet propelled.

It was eight miles to the main gates of Ellwood Crest, and another two from there to the front steps of the main house. Or I guess I should call it a mansion. No sooner had we braked to a velvety stop in front, than a butler came tripping down to my side of the car. He opened the door and smiled.

"Welcome to Ellwood Crest, Mr. Lacey. If you'll permit me, sir, I'll take your luggage and show you to your room. The Master is at the pool with the others. It is in the south garden. This way, sir, please."

"This way" was up the front steps and in through wide doors, and along a mile-long hallway toward a broad flight of stairs that cut in on the left. As we reached the bottom steps, three people came down from above—a girl and two men, and all were in swim stuff. The girl was really something. Strictly yum-yum from her Venetian beach sandals to the top of her four-alarm red hair. She stopped three steps above me, and flashed a very nice smile.

"Hello," she said in a voice that went

with all the rest. "I'm Alice Taylor. Who are you?"

"The name is Chet Lacey," I told her. "Your grandfather invited me down for the weekend."

"And I'm very glad he did," she came right back. "Chet, I want you to meet Bill Monroe, and Carey Hall. Bill and Carey, Chet Lacey."

It was not until then that I took a real good look at the two lads with her. Monroe was the blonde type. Good looks, good teeth, and I was pretty sure that the hand he gave me had thrown more than one touchdown pass for the winning score. Hall was on the dark side, but good looking, too, in his way. I guessed that he topped Monroe by five years at least. And when we shook hands something clicked in the old Lacey brain. The only trouble was, I didn't know what it was that clicked. Just something, and before I could begin to give it any thought, the Taylor wench had told me to hurry up and join them at the pool, and had gone sailing by me with the two boy friends in tow.

I followed the butler up the stairs, and past an acre or so of rooms to the one that had been picked for me. Very, very nice, too. After telling me how to reach the pool, and asking me if I wanted him to bring me a drink, which I didn't, he went out and on his way.

I took a look at the bedroom, living room, and beautiful bath. Then I pinched myself and started making ready to join the others.

HALF an hour later I was down at the pool. And, brother, what a pool! Two hundred feet by a hundred I guessed it, and all a greenish streaked marble that formed a ten foot wide apron all around the edge. On the apron were all kinds of chairs, and tables on which were all kind of things you might like to have while you were enjoying such a beautiful swimming pool. Some twenty-five guys and gals were in or out of the pool, and everybody was certainly having one swell time.

"Got here, eh?" a voice suddenly snapped in my ear. "Good!"

I turned my head to see George B. Taylor standing beside me. He had just come out of the pool and he looked

more of a bean-pole than ever. And much more water-soaked than the last time.

"I arrived half an hour ago, sir," I smiled. "Quite a wonderful place you have."

"It's a blasted white elephant!" he bit off. "Well, have a good time. Nobody introduces anybody to anybody here, Lacey, so I won't bother. Just dive in and have fun. I'll have a talk with you later, when you've had a chance to look over the set-up. Oh, Mary? Where's that Scotch you promised to have ready?"

Having addressed that last to somebody named Mary, Taylor left me flat. I happened to be standing beside one of the tables, so the Lacey had a Scotch, too. I didn't drink it all, though. A cute little blonde trick snatched it from my hand, drained it, laughed and jackknifed into the pool. I jackknifed in after her, and the battle was on, to coin a phrase.

Anyway, thus began seven of the most screwy, wonderful hours I ever spent, or ever hope to spend. Don't get me wrong. No rough stuff, and nobody got seas-over from the stuff on the pool tables. Everybody just had lots of fun, and gave a whole lot of inhibitions an airing. I met everybody there in one way or another. If not at the pool, then later when supper was served outdoors by the hired help, barbecue style, with those neat, bug-catching lights strung from the trees.

Frankly, that American made Shangi-la had me spinning right from that first Scotch the blonde trick swiped from me. But every so often I did manage to come up for air and remember why I was there. Little good that did me, though. Except for one thing, or maybe I should say, two. Monroe and Hall. In Taylor's own words, those two were the "closet in the running" as regards the old man's granddaughter. One or the other was by her side all the time. And whenever I took time out to peek, I could tell that she liked it very much to have one or the other by her side. And maybe Monroe a little more so than the Hall gent.

As a matter of fact, I stared at Hall most. That something that had clicked

when I first met him didn't click again. Still, way back in the Lacey brain there was something nagging. Had I met him before? I didn't know. Under good or bad circumstances? I didn't know that, either, nor could I guess. It got my goat more and more, and two or three times I was tempted to go over and ask for the lad's life story, so that maybe I could check. Of course I didn't. The Lacey just stayed put and enjoyed himself. Wonderful work for a thousand bucks, too!

Eventually, though, the outdoor party came to an end. People began wandering toward the house two and three at a time, and singing out good night to anybody who cared to answer. And then when I decided I might as well pack up too, Taylor touched me on the arm. "Have a cigarette, Lacey," he said in a low voice, "and then come to my rooms. Second floor, south wing. We'll have a nightcap, and talk. There's something I want to tell you."

Before I could say anything, he had walked away. So I took my cue and eased away from the spot as though heading for the house. Once I was in the shadows, though, I veered off and just walked along. Yeah, the party *was* over for the Lacey, unless whatever Taylor had to say changed things. I mean, it was just not my dish of tea. Sure, I had learned that Monroe and Hall were sweet on the Taylor kid, and she seemed to be pretty sweet on them. So what? Could be it was like that, too, with a dozen other lads. That certainly didn't prove that anybody had almost pushed her grandpop off a seven hundred foot drop, or taken a nocturnal shot at him with a rifle. Rats! Maybe the guy who had actually done it, if he had, wasn't even at the party.

NOPE! It was suddenly a case I didn't want at all. It was strictly a bodyguard job. Yeah, catch the would-be killer in his third attempt and nail him cold. Not for me. I like things you have to work out, and there just wasn't anything to work out on this one. Oh sure, I could check and recheck on Monroe and Hall, and those dozen other lads if and when I met them, but that could take weeks and weeks. It

was still not for the Lacey, even if he made Taylor's Shangri-la his home all the while.

So as I strolled along and eventually got down by the now completely deserted swimming pool, I made up my mind that unless Taylor really had something to tell me, I'd call it off, give him back his thousand bucks, thank him for a time like I'd never had in my life, and catch the early morning train back to town. A whole lot of my friends may swear, no, but I really do have a conscience the same as you or the next bird.

Anyway, as I walked along the long side of the swimming pool, I made up my mind that that was what I would do. Maybe if my head hadn't been full of such thoughts I might have heard the quick step behind me before I did. Which was just one split second too late. I didn't have the chance to turn more than a quarter of the way around before the night fell down on my head, just back of the left ear, like ten ton of brick.

It was more of a glancing blow, otherwise I wouldn't be telling you this. But it was enough of a clout to knock me dizzy, and spill me off that marble lip into the pool clean as a whistle. Maybe instinct made me twist enough so that I sliced down into the water. And maybe hitting the water had something to do with the Lacey memory. Anyway, a light went on in my head, and it wasn't one caused by any spinning stars and colored comets, either.

Funny thing about my business. Sometimes you get a case that goes off like firecrackers right from the first word out of the client's mouth. And sometimes you get one that drags along hopelessly until suddenly, *whammo*, the balloon goes up with all hands aboard.

Anyway, the light went on in my head, and my brain reacted instantly. I had hit the water fairly clean so I kept right on going down. When close to the bottom, I twisted around and swam back under water until I felt the side of the pool. Then I let myself float slowly upward and broke surface under the lip overhang. There was just room enough there to get my nose, eyes, and both ears out of water, and not be

seen by anybody standing on the edge of the pool.

Obviously, somebody wanted the Lacey out. No, not crude murder. The lug was just strolling along the edge of the pool, and he slipped and cracked his skull on the marble as he fell in. He simply drowned before he could regain consciousness. Simple, very effective—and safe.

So I stayed put there under the lip, listening hard, and thinking of that Keep-Off note the street urchin had given me, and almost vowing to give up the private eye business for being such a dope as to have walked into this one. I didn't hear a thing save distant sounds. And after maybe seven or eight minutes I eased my head out from under the lip hangover and took a look. Nothing. Just nothing but a whole lot of night shadows. And not one that moved to clout me a second time.

No doubt, a certain somebody had done the job, and then breezed out of there before anybody else could happen along.

That was perfectly okay by me, except for the clouting part. So after a minute or so spent making sure that none of those shadows was going to move my way, I fished myself out of that pool and made squishy tracks for the house. I slipped in a rear entrance so that nobody would see me, and after considerable back-tracking along the wrong hallways, and dodging other Ellwood Crest guests, I found Taylor's suite of rooms in the south wing. I knocked on what I hoped was the right door.

IT was. He opened it, took one look, and opened his mouth to start barking. I went in fast, took the door out of his hands, and closed it.

"What the devil happened to you, Lacey?" finally came off his lips. "Here, man, take my drink. You look half drowned."

I took the half drink he held in his hand, and finished it. It didn't take away the chill, because I didn't have any chill. But it did stop half the little people in my head slinging sledge hammers around.

"Fell in the pool, and didn't wait to

change," I said to him. "What did you want to see me about?"

He started to speak, changed his mind, and walked over to a nice easy chair. He dropped into it, and waved at another one. So I did likewise.

"My granddaughter," Taylor suddenly said. "This morning she asked me for ten thousand dollars."

"For what?" I asked.

"Refused to tell me!" he snapped. "Incidentally, Alice gets five hundred a week allowance. I said I wouldn't give it to her unless she told me. She then said that if I didn't trust her, she didn't want it. And walked away. Lacey, I'm worried about that girl. Something's definitely wrong."

I didn't say anything for a moment. A second light had winked on in the Lacey head, and it was hooked into the same circuit as that first light. Yeah, some cases just drag alone hopelessly until suddenly, *whammo!*

"Something definitely *is*, sir," I said quietly. Then as he opened his mouth, "but I don't know just what, yet. Is that phone a house one, or what?"

I pointed at one on a corner table. Taylor turned around, turned back, and shook his head.

"Not a house phone," he said. "I use these rooms as my office. That's a direct wire to outside."

I glanced at the table clock. It was late, but not too late, I hoped. But first I had to make sure of a couple of things.

"I want you to do something, Taylor, and not be seen doing it," I said, and I wasn't using any house guest voice either. "Go to my room and get my bag and bring it here. While you're gone, I'm using your phone."

He blinked just once, then nodded, and got up.

"I'll get it," he bit off, "but I'll want a good explanation later. Maybe a lot of them."

"Maybe you'll get a lot of them," I said blandly, and waited for him to leave.

The instant he did, I bee-lined it over to the phone and put through a rush call to Captain Sol Bierman of our local Homicide. My old pal, and dearest enemy, incidentally. I got him in one

minute flat, and started shooting questions. Being Sol Bierman, he pricked up his ears at once, but I refused to give. He cursed me up and down, but finally answered my questions. I was just hanging up as Taylor came back in with my bag.

Here's the blasted thing," he growled, and tossed it on a chair. "Now, what the devil's next?"

"The other guests," I said. "Would they all be bye-bye now, do you think?"

"In this house?" he snorted. "Small chance of that. Most of them are down in the bar, or elsewhere. I simply came to my rooms because I can't take it like I once used to. Besides, I wanted to talk with you alone. Lacey! About my granddaughter, I—"

"How's your nerve, Taylor?" I cut in on him. "If it's good, I think I can catch your would-be killer tonight. Among other things."

"Then why the devil do you ask?" he rapped out. "Of course, my nerve is good. And what the devil do you mean, among other things?"

"Nothing right now," I skipped it. "Look, I want you to go hunting for me. Ask people if they've seen me. Then hunt for me out on the grounds. Might even sing out my name a couple of times. And eventually work down to the swimming pool. Will you do that?"

"And if I do, then what?" he demanded in that buggy whip voice of his.

I took a good look at him, and decided I had the old boy sized up right. He either would, or he wouldn't, and no quibbling.

"No questions," I said evenly, "but if you do, I don't think your rifle shooting friend will ever bother you again."

I was right. George B. Taylor didn't even hesitate.

"Good enough for me," he snapped. "When do I start looking? Now?"

"Now," I nodded. And then, because it just came out, I said, "You're quite a man, Mr. Taylor."

"Baloney!" he bit off. "Not when you've led the life I have, young man!"

And with that he went out.

AS soon as he had gone, I popped open my bag and took out my gun I'd brought along. Then I switched off the

lights, and went over to one of the windows. It was fifteen feet to the ground, but the builder, who perhaps had a second story man for a cousin, had put a gutter drain pipe right handy. I went down it monkey style to the ground. And, hugging the darker shadows, I made my way to a point where I could watch the front door.

I didn't check with my waterproof wristwatch, but it was about twenty minutes before Taylor came out the front door and down the steps. He stopped there, and sang out my name a couple of times. Then he started walking down the semi-circle drive. I started walking, too, but well back in the shadows. And every step I took was as loud as though I was walking on velvet.

Back up in Taylor's room, my little plan had seemed very neat and simple. That is, if everything went according to my plan. That's what was crawling up my spine now, as I silently trailed Taylor. I mean, that something unexpected might pop up and the Lacey would be left sucking his thumbs. Professional killers usually use a gun, or a knife, or poison, or something like that. They don't ordinarily switch weapons.

Taylor's would-be killer had. He'd tried it with a car, and with a rifle. That made him a spur-of-the-moment lad, and there was no telling what he might try next. Sure, it was my plan to put the perfect opportunity right before his eyes. But would he wait that long? And then again, was my deep figuring all screwy?

Those and about six million other thoughts churned around in the old brain as I soft-footed it along after Taylor. In tight spots like that, your nerves go haywire, no matter how long you've been in the business. And Lacey was no exception to prove the rule. My nerves sang and twanged, and my imagination went forty different directions at the same time. Half a dozen times I froze stiff, dead certain that we two were three—that somebody else was playing night hide and seek with us.

But each time I could see nothing, and hear even less—save Taylor barking out my name every so often.

But I could *feel* something, or somebody. And as Taylor drew nearer and nearer to the swimming pool, that feeling increased by leaps and bounds. So much so that I froze every six steps and brought my gun up, positive that I would be using it before I took another step. No dice, though, and I would move on again through the shadows.

Then, finally, I came out through the hedgerow of trees that bordered the pool. Taylor was no more than forty feet ahead of me, and he was walking slowly along the marble lip. Just a lean tall shadow to me, but I was able to hold him dead center in focus. With each step he took along the marble lip I took an even longer one in the pitch dark shadows of the trees. In that manner, the two of us circled the south end of the pool and started along up the other side.

Then, suddenly, as Taylor stopped and stood looking down into the pool, I knew that the big moment had arrived. A sort of high voltage shot went through me, or maybe you don't believe that. Anyway, it did, and I froze where I was with my gun ready, and all the rest of me, too.

One, two, three fast seconds—and then a figure darted out of the dark to my left and sped pussy-foot straight for Taylor!

I could see him plain as day. I could see his upraised right arm, and the lengths of something he held in it. Did I leap forward, too, and bellow for him to drop it? I did not! The Lacey plays his cases the way the Lacey figures they should be played. So, instead, I drew

a fast bead on that speeding shadow and squeezed the trigger of my gun.

Just once!

Of course I didn't see it right then. But I knew that my slug hit him just in front of the left ear and went right on in. He spun halfway around, and then fell flat on the marble lip. The thing he held in his hand clanged loud like an old bell. The lad bounced once, and then lay still—because he was very, very dead.

IN the echo of my shot, Taylor spun around, and almost fell into the pool. But he saved himself in the nick of time. He was sucking in air, and making other sounds, by the time I reached the lad on the marble lip, and rolled him over.

"Good heavens, that's Hall!" Taylor gasped. "Carey Hall's his name. You've killed him, Lacey!"

"Better him than you, Taylor," I said, straightening up. "That tire iron still in his hand was on its way to carve your skull when I fired."

"But—but you killed him!" Old George B. Taylor couldn't seem to get over it.

I got mad. So mad for a second I almost wanted to punch him on his eagle beak nose. But I curbed the urge and got back on the track.

"Yes. I killed him to save you, Taylor," I said tight lipped. "And that's the story when we get around to the cops. It happens to be the truth. First, though, one more item. We're going back up to your rooms, and you're to send for your granddaughter."

[Turn page]

This situation calls for

WILDROOT

CREAM OIL



NON-ALCOHOLIC
Contains
LANOLIN



also in
TUBES

WILDROOT
Hair Tonic
WILDROOT
CREAM-OIL
LANOLIN

EASY TO USE
NO WASTE
OR SPILLING
HANDY FOR
TRAVELING

"What?" he snapped. "Look here, Lacey, I—"

"Shut up!" I choked him off. "If you want this thing done up right, then do exactly as I say! Well?"

George B. Taylor was the same character he had been in his rooms. He didn't so much as bat an eye, or hesitate.

"Come along!" he rapped out. "Thank goodness we're far enough from the house so nobody seems to have heard the shot."

"It wouldn't help Hall if anybody did," I said, and let it go at that.

Maybe fifteen minutes later Alice Taylor came sailing into her grandfather's rooms. She wore a different evening number than I had seen her in last, and it was even more trick if anything. The smile on her lips faded when she saw me. She quickly looked at old Taylor, and frowned.

"You wanted to see me, Granddad?" she asked, closing the door.

Taylor didn't look at her. He looked at me, and waited. I didn't keep him waiting long.

"Charlie Haven is dead, Miss Taylor," I said. "I just shot him as he tried to kill your grandfather down by the pool."

I spoke in a matter of fact voice, but it was as though I'd bellowed the words at her. She froze stiff, went dead white, and then slowly backed up a couple of steps until she was against the door.

"No!" she got out in a strangled whisper. Then with a bit more force, "Oh, thank God, thank God!"

I glanced at Taylor. He was sitting stiff as a ramrod in his chair, and the eyes he had fixed on his granddaughter were bugging out a foot. Suddenly, he was able to find his tongue.

"Alice!" he barked. "Alice, my dear! What in heaven's name?"

She didn't say anything. She was too choked up emotionally to speak. She just stared at him an instant, and then turned mute, appealing eyes my way. I smiled and shook my head.

"No, Miss Taylor," I said, "I don't know the details, and I don't want to know them. It's your secret, and only

yours, just as long as you want to keep it that way. Charlie Haven is dead, and that's that as far as I'm concerned."

THE tears glistened in her eyes, and she licked her lips. "Thank you," she whispered. "Thank you very much."

There was a second of silence, and then Taylor broke it.

"Here, *here!*" he rasped. "What the devil?"

"Charlie Haven, Carey Hall to you," I said, looking at him, "was one of those cheap gentry who make their living off the ladies. Ladies with money who seek a kick out of life, and—well, who don't know any better at the time. Black-mail is the word, but they play it very smoothly. They get their victim in a jam, and then very gallantly get them out of it. The victim is grateful and soon forgets all about it. But the boys like Haven don't. A few years later, when the victim is happy and so forth, up he pops. The old out-of-the-past stuff. The victim pays, and pays, and pays—and so forth."

"But the attempts on my life!" Taylor snapped. "Why—"

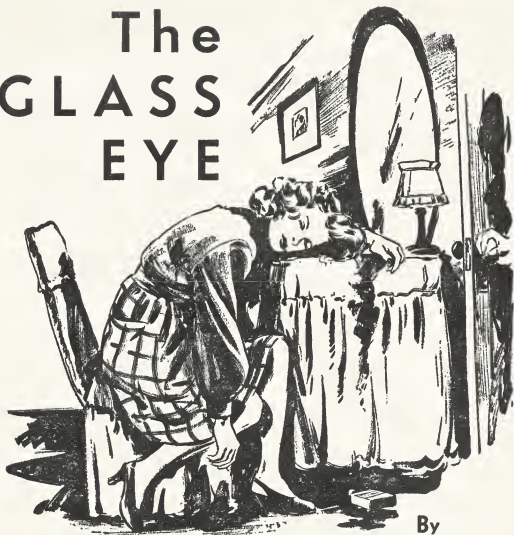
"Obvious." I cut in with a quick look at the girl. "Your granddaughter had been paying out every cent she could get her hands on. For how long, doesn't matter. Haven wanted more. She asked you for ten thousand this morning, didn't she? But Haven wanted much more than that. And he got what he thought was a very slick idea. He knew about your will, of course. Well? With you dead, and all your wealth turned over to your granddaughter, what sweet, sweet picking for him!"

"That's true, Granddad," the girl said in a weary voice. "He was blackmailing me. For almost two years, now. But, I never dreamed that he would kill you. I thought it really was your imagination. Truly, I did. You see, about five years ago I met Charlie Haven at a—"

"No, Alice!" Taylor stopped her cold. "I don't want to know about it either, my dear. As Lacey says, it is your secret alone, and it shall remain yours. And, my dear, nothing is changed. The past

(Continued on page 93)

The GLASS EYE



Wells' wife had been found dead in front of her dressing table

By
O. B. MYERS

Marco Wells couldn't have killed his wife because—

THE COURTROOM, on the fifth day, was seething with frazzled tempers and overstretched nerves. The voices echoed angrily from the lofty, vaulted ceiling.

"When did your relations with Miss Coone first become—"

"Your Honor, I object!"

The gavel slammed down. "Objection sustained!"

"Did you, in August, take your secretary to a hotel in—"

"Object!"

"Sustained!"

"But how can the character of this defendant be shown to—"

"Objection!"

The gavel pounded angrily. Judge Emory leaned down.

"Gentlemen, I must remind you that this is a murder trial, not an investigation of the defendant's morals. By the evidence so far adduced, there is no direct connection between the secretary, Miss Coone, and the crime, and her conduct at some prior date has no bearing. The state will confine questions to facts related to the crime."

Sidney Tohler lowered himself into his chair with a satisfied jerk of his round, bald head. The elegant Miss Coone crossed her legs the other way and lowered her long, dark lashes while she examined her rose-tinted fingernails.

Young Dave Bryan, assistant D. A. handling the prosecution, mopped his crimson face with a damp handkerchief, and shuffled papers on the table until he recovered his poise.

At this moment the man in the witness chair raised his hand.

"Your Honor?"

The judge turned his head.

"May I make a statement, if it pleases the court?"

Judge Emory appeared faintly suspicious, but he said, "You may make any statement you wish, so long as it is true, and pertinent."

Marco Wells, leaning on one arm of the chair, smiled faintly as he said, "Thank you." He was on trial for his life, but you would never have guessed it from his mien. Impeccably attired in a double-breasted gray suit with a blue tie, his high, bulging forehead was unlined, his slanting hazel eyes alert but not worried. Of all those in the court, he appeared, and was, the least ruffled. A lawyer himself, clashes over the admissibility of evidence were an old story.

Furthermore, he had a fine sense for the dramatic moment.

"My counsel," he said with a slight nod toward Sidney Tohler, "is overcautious. I have nothing to conceal. I am perfectly willing to admit that I was, and am, deeply in love with Candy Coone, and that the murder of my wife removed the greatest obstacle to my happiness."

IT WAS as if a bomb, exploding silently, had nevertheless shocked every nerve in the room into frozen immobility. Stunned by amazement, no one moved, no one seemed to breathe. Even the blasé, gum-chewing court reporter, completing a few flourishes and pot-hooks in his book, held his fountain pen poised in mid-air as if paralyzed. Into this breathless silence, facing toward the jury, Marco Wells continued to pour words, calm, studied, confidently articulate.

His life, he said, was an open book. He had always made a point of hiding nothing; that was his way of doing business. Some men, thinking to enhance their self-importance, made themselves difficult to approach. He, on the contrary, could always be seen at any time. It was well known in Millington that in his suite on the fourth floor of the Marsden Building he had installed a full-size window between his private office and the waiting room, where his secretary sat. Thus his friends—in fact, any and all visitors—could see at a glance whether he was in or out, and never had occasion to suspect that they were being fobbed off with a false, "Sorry; he's not in just now."

Perhaps, he admitted coyly, that was why he had so many friends. His professional attitude, more that of a public servant and good Samaritan to the needy, had never made him much money, but it had made him—thank God—friends who stood by him in his trouble. Were it not for his friends, he could see that it was quite probable that he would be convicted of a crime he had never committed.

Sidney Tohler seized the arms of his chair, as if to rise and object, but subsided at a look from Wells.

The defendant proceeded coolly to declare that he had lost all affection for his wife more than a year ago. She was harsh, suspicious, intolerant. Above all, she detested his friends. He had found solace in the company of the charming Miss Coone. Solace had developed into whole-hearted affection. They wished to marry, but his wife had objected; had in fact refused him a divorce on any grounds whatsoever. In short, he admitted with disarming frankness, he had

had every reason to wish his wife out of the way.

"Your Honor," spluttered his own counsel, "I—I object!"

The judge awoke from his own engrossed attention. "The defendant is speaking voluntarily. Let him continue."

"Gentlemen, you will shortly be charged," Wells told the jury. "The judge will tell you that in order to convict, you must have proof not only of motive and intent, but of opportunity. No matter how much I may have wished my wife dead, it must have been physically possible for me to have shot her on October Seventh, between four and five P.M."

To the enthralled jury he then sketched the evidence as it had been presented. How his wife had been found dead of bullet wounds in front of her dressing table, at the dinner hour. How the bullets had been demonstrated to have been fired from the .38 caliber revolver found lying on the floor at her feet; a revolver not only traced to his ownership, but so skilfully proved to carry his fingerprints.

Yes, certainly it was his revolver. He had kept it in his desk for years. He seldom looked to see if it were there, much less fired it. How easy it would have been for someone—he made no guess as to identity—to have lifted it from his drawer, and to have used it; handling it with gloves, or perhaps a handkerchief, so as to leave plenty of his fingerprints unsmudged.

The D. A.—he inclined his head gravely toward Dave Bryan—had made the point that he could have walked out without crossing the waiting room, by using the communicating door through his partner's office, who, was out of town that day. Descending the service stairs, he could have covered the four blocks to the Belvedere apartments, murdered his wife, and returned by the same route, all without being seen by anyone who recognized him. In October it was quite dark around five. Such a thing was possible—only he hadn't done it.

He couldn't have done it. Why? Because he was sitting in his office that whole time. How did they, the jury, know that? Because, unfortunately for

the prosecution but fortunately for him, two reliable witnesses had testified to that fact. He did not look toward Foster Havens or George Fredericks, both of whom were sitting just behind the press-box, but kept his eyes on the jury. He pointed out to them that they were therefore being called on to consider an utter lack of opportunity for the defendant; in short, an impossibility.

AT THIS Bryan, recovering his wits, was on his feet, but the judge looked up at the clock on the wall.

"There will not be time for summations and charge today."

"Your Honor," pressed Bryan, "I would like to reserve the right further to cross-examination of this witness."

"Granted," nodded the judge. His gavel banged. "Court dismissed!"

The big room seethed into a bustle of movement and conversation.

Sam Ix lifted his elbows from the railing of the press enclosure and removed his pencil from his mouth. It looked like a paintbrush. He shoved it disgustingly into his pocket, and followed it with scraps of yellow paper from the table. His corn-yellow hair was rumpled, his brows twisted in a frown of displeasure. He got up onto his long legs and half turned as the prisoner was led past.

Marco Wells moved with quick, mincing steps, one hand in his pocket, completely at ease, though from the gleam in his eyes it was obvious that he was aware of the sensation he had created. Sam gave him a short, sour glance. But Wells, propelled by an attendant's hand on his arm, was looking over Sam's shoulder.

"Attaboy, Marco!" called George Fredericks, over the hubbub, waving a folded newspaper. "See you outside in a day or two!"

Wells nodded and passed on, smiling confidently.

The saloon-keeper and political henchman of the Fourth Ward, lowering his arm, was now facing Sam. His grin became a grimace.

"I see you read a good newspaper," remarked Sam, noting that Fredericks' hand held a copy of yesterday's *Star-Record*.

The other man grunted, and looked at his hand as if discovering that he was holding a snake. With a gesture of contempt he flung it to the already cluttered press table.

"You and your rag!" he sneered. "If either one of you is still on the streets a month from now, I'll eat my shirt!"

Sam countered cheerfully, "I hope you like shirts, Mr. Fredericks," but the other man was already following Foster Havens on the heels of the crowd pressing toward the door.

The other news hounds, from the city papers, had made off for the telephones, but Sam had only to walk a block and a half to be in his own city room. He skimmed the table with his fingertips once more, to be sure that he wasn't forgetting any of his notes. In doing so, he lifted the folded edition that George Fredericks has tossed down. From it a card slipped out. Sam picked it up.

It was a picture postal with an extravagantly retouched photo in color of a many-windowed beach front hotel. He turned it over; it was postmarked Miami Beach, April 5th, and was addressed in a stiff, slanting penmanship to George Fredericks at the Millington Athletic Club. In the left-hand column, for correspondence, the same hand had written:

My dear Friend—Am enjoying Miami very great. Hope you and yours are well. Thank for many favors. Yrs —

The name Sam could not at first decipher. He finally decided it was Victor Myrzadan. It was a name he had never seen or heard before in his life, and meant nothing to him.

He glanced after the man who had dropped it. The crowd was oozing through the doors; Fredericks was already turning out into the corridor. Sam shrugged, and slipped the card into his pocket.

When he reached the *Star-Record* building, he first sat down with a rewrite man, giving him a sharp but accurate outline of the day's developments in State vs Wells. Then he went to his cubicle to write a piece under his own by-line. Propped in his typewriter he found a note. It said simply, "See Mr. Theall."

The boss's office was on the floor above.

Sam entered, pushing a gloomy frown before him. Another gloomy frown met him.

"Hello, Sam. What happened at the trial?"

Roger Theall wasn't much older than Sam, but his dark hair was touched with gray at the temples. He listened closely while Sam sketched the highlights of the day.

"I never saw such a brazen challenge to justice," declared the reporter. "Wells practically told the jury, 'Even if I am guilty, you can't convict me as long as my friends stand by me.' Friends!"

"Of course he's a lawyer," mused Theall, "and knows that that attitude of concealing nothing makes a big hit with the jury. He's staking everything on that alibi; the fact that he was in his office at the time, isn't he? Do you think it can be broken down?"

SAM shook his head gloomily. "His secretary swears he was still there at four-thirty, when she left. That's only partial, and anyway her testimony by itself wouldn't weigh so much, especially after he's admitted that she was his mistress. But Fredericks and Havens were both sitting there waiting for him till after five, when they all went out together to the Athletic Club for a few drinks. Their evidence is direct and blunt. It's like a stone wall. You can't break through it without breaking them."

The editor flipped his thumb nail against a thick stack of folded documents on his desk. "Looks more like they're breaking us."

"Why, what's that?" asked Sam.

"Summons and complaint served on me this afternoon. A libel suit against the *Star-Record*, against me, and against you for five hundred thousand dollars.

Sam gasped. "Half a million! Why, they haven't got a chance!"

Theall shrugged. "If they got a verdict for only one-tenth of that, it would bankrupt the paper, wipe out my bankroll, and put you out in the street without a job."

Sam growled angrily, "They can't do

that! How about the freedom of the press?"

"The freedom of the press is all very well, but you can't slander a man in print unless you can prove it. You know perfectly well that over the last six months, you have tried and convicted Marco Wells in your columns, and impugned his witnesses. I've let you do it, because I believed like you, that Wells was guilty. As a matter of fact, I still believe it. But that's not the point. The point is—will the court find him guilty?"

"They haven't found him innocent yet," muttered Sam.

"No, but he must be pretty confident, or he wouldn't have had his lawyers serve these papers. And if he is declared innocent, you and I are up to our necks without a life-belt."

Sam rasped, "What did I ever say that wasn't true?"

"You want me to read it to you? Here, wait a minute—" Theall touched the stack of papers.

"No, no, don't read it!" cried Sam. "I feel bad enough already."

He began to pace the floor, shoving his hands in his pockets. His fingers touched something; he drew out the postal card.

Seeing Sam eying it, the editor asked, "What've you got there? Anything connected with the case?"

The reporter shrugged. "Search me. Just a piece of George Fredericks' mail, that he inadvertently dropped in the court room."

The man at the desk took the card, examined it. "Myrzadan," he mumbled two or three times, having difficulty with the pronunciation. "Who is he? Do you know?"

"No; never heard of him."

"I wonder if he comes from Millington." The editor reached for the telephone directory, and thumbed the pages rapidly. "Yes, here he is. Residence; Four-Fourteen Poulter Street. He must be on vacation in Florida."

"He's a friend of George Fredericks', and he sends George a picture postal—so what?"

Theall pushed the directory aside, frowning. "I don't see any connection, myself. You think they'll finish tomorrow?"

"I don't see how they can drag it out any longer, unless one side or the other has a surprise witness to spring." He sauntered dejectedly toward the door.

"Where are you going, Sam?"

"I'm going out and gargle a couple of quick ones. It may be the last evening I can do it without getting the jailer's consent. Join me?"

The editor shook his head. "I'm driving into the city for dinner in about. Huh! I should have started ten minutes ago! Call me in the morning, Sam."

In the bar on the next corner Sam pondered morosely, his fingers curled round a highball, while he stared blankly out a side window. He was thinking of the man with the queer name, down in Miami. He would now be swanking in the lobby of a palatial hotel, lazing on the sun-drenched beach. At that moment his eye was caught by the sign on the corner. It said Poulter Street. He squinted, puzzled.

THAT seemed odd. Men who lolled on southern beaches generally paid plenty for the privilege. Yet Poulter Street, as he knew well, was not a high-class residential street. In fact, it was scarcely a residential street at all, but a narrow thoroughfare, usually jammed with trucks, that squeezed through the business district and petered out in small shops and shacks out on Sutter's Hill. As a neighborhood, it simply didn't match up with a sojourn in Miami Beach.

Sam swallowed the rest of the highball and nodded to the bartender. Then he changed his mind. "No, hold it a bit, Mike. I'll be back in a few minutes."

He went out the side door and turned right, walking unhurriedly. In the three hundred block he passed a delicatessen, a hardware store, the telephone exchange building, a small *pizzeria*, and a large parking lot. Beyond the next corner, where the numbers jumped to the four hundreds, there was first a big commercial garage, next to it a dingy row of semi-detached wooden houses all of which had been converted to business. The first two had been knocked together; a machine shop occupied the lower floors, a glove manufacturer the second.

A store front had been tacked onto

the next, Number 414. A painted sign above the grimy show window said, ACE GLASS & PAINT CO., and below it in much smaller letters, V. MYRZADAN, PROP. A door in the middle gave access to the store; on one side, at the corner of the building, was another door. They were both closed.

Sam crossed the street. The store door was locked, and to its frosted glass panel was pasted a square of yellow paper on which was printed in pencil, *Closed till April 12*. He peered through the dusty show windows, saw shelves holding paint in variegated can sizes, racks of sheet glass, a large, flat work table, and an old-fashioned glass showcase holding display advertising in vivid colors.

He moved to his left to the other door. Over the handle of an antiquated bell-pull a tarnished brass oblong held part of a business card on which was printed, *Victor Myrzan, Prop.* It was evident that Mr. Myrzan, Prop. lived upstairs over his store, when he was not kicking his heels in the Florida sunshine.

Sam pulled the handle, producing a melodious jangle somewhere inside. After a few moments he heard steps descending stairs, and the door was opened quickly, but cautiously.

"Please?"

The woman who faced him in the opening looked to be at least fifty, though she might have been younger. She wore a clean but frayed apron over a faded blue house dress, both of them falling to her ankles. Her hair was dark, shredded with gray, and was pulled straight back to a bun at the nape of her neck so tightly that it lifted her eyebrows. She had a prominent nose, high bony cheekbones, and intensely black eyes. She was neither hostile nor friendly. Her expression was so cold and indifferent that it was in effect no expression at all.

"My name is Ix," began Sam. "I was looking for—"

"Please?"

Sam used to this, though he had never yet been taken for a former Secretary of the Interior. "Ix," he repeated. "Eye—Ecks for Ix. I wanted to ask about Mr. Myrzan." He wondered if Myrzan, too, always had to spell out his

name to strangers.

"My husband is away," she told him with flat finality. "You must come back Monday, please."

"Yes, I know. But I want some work done on my house, and a friend of mine, George Fredericks, told me that your husband would do it."

The change, when she smiled, was astonishing. Her whole face came alive, shedding its wooden mask. The effect was like magic; she was no longer a stuffed figure, but a warm, human woman.

"Ah-h-h! You are friend of Mr. Fredericks? But come in! Come upstairs, yes, please. I must do for you what I can; please."

Sam hesitated a moment, but then followed her up the steep, straight stairs. Through a door at the top she led him into what he took for a living room, but which she undoubtedly thought of as the parlor. The furniture dated from the gas-light era, and was grouped about a round center table with meticulous formality. Under a spotless mantel three birch logs reposed on gleaming brass andirons. The lace curtains at the front windows were so stiff with starch that you could have scratched a match on them.

SAM was mumbling some vague explanations about merely wishing to find out when the glazier was coming back.

"Oh, but Monday he will be here! He is in Florida, you know?"

She said Florida as if it were a synonym for Heaven.

"Yes, I know. He is enjoying himself?"

"Oh, so very much! But I have a card; wait."

She bustled out to another room, bustled back again. "The hotel where he is sleeping—five hundred rooms—imagine!"

Sam looked at the card. It was a duplicate of the one that had been sent to George Fredericks. The handwriting was the same. It read:

Mamma—Am sleeping this hotel. Very fine place. I swam in the ocean yesterday. Please wash my blue jumpers. Yrs, Victor.

Sam nodded. "Yes, he sent George a

card, too. I suppose he had—er—done some work for Mr. Fredericks?"

"Yes, my husband put the mirrors behind the bar in Mr. Fredericks' restaurant. Very fine mirrors—forty dollars apiece wholesale, they cost. And he does work for Mr. Wells, too."

Sam pricked up his ears. "Mr. Wells? Marco Wells, you mean?"

"Yes. But only a little; two, three times. But nothing much; we did never expect such a kindness like this. And Mr. Wells having such great trouble, too."

"You mean that your husband had something to do with the trouble Marco Wells is having?"

"Oh, no, no! Victor knows nothing about that terrible business. But it is the kindness of Mr. Wells that lets my husband take a vacation; the first in twenty years."

Sam looked puzzled. "I don't quite get it."

She explained eagerly, in her correct but heavily larded accent, as if surprised that he did not already know all about it. Mr. Fredericks had come into the store one day, more than two weeks ago. He had explained to Victor that a friend of his, having made complete travel and hotel reservations for a trip to Florida, found himself unable to go. The friend, in fact, was Marco Wells. He had expected the trip to be finished, and himself freed, before the end of March, but things had dragged. These reservations, it seemed, had all been paid for in advance, even to incidentals, and for some reason could not be returned or canceled. There they were; it was either throw them away, or let someone else use them. Wells himself had suggested Victor.

"Mr. Fredericks, he said, would be very happy to go himself. But he must stay in Millington, to be a witness, you see."

"Yes, I see. So your husband took the tickets?"

The little glazier, she explained, had been stunned by the offer, and at first reluctant to accept such an expensive favor. But Fredericks had insisted it was nothing. All that money would otherwise be wasted. She, too, had been amazed, but not enough to prevent her

from urging her husband to take advantage of the opportunity.

"For so many years he has worked like a slave; very hard, Mr. Ix. So I tell him, go! He would like I should come with him, but I say no, I stay here and keep his home for him. When he comes back, then he tells me all about it; yes?"

Sam could see in her no hint of deception or double-dealing whatsoever. She was obviously just what she appeared; the cooking, scrubbing, mending wife of a hard-working small business man who had just experienced a miraculous stroke of good fortune. But Sam was staring at her so intently that suddenly she took alarm. Her smile sagged, a flash of terror lit her eyes.

"He—is all right; Victor? Something has happened to him?"

"No, no, he's all right," Sam assured her. "As far as I know, he's living the life of Riley in that big hotel."

She was puzzled. "The life of—who?"

"Skip it. He's having himself a swell time. But tell me about Marco Wells. Did you see him here often?"

"I have never seen him once, even. He only sends for Victor to do work for him, now and then."

"What kind of work?"

"A little painting, perhaps; I do not know. Nothing big. So we are much surprised at this wonderful present."

"I should think you would be," commented Sam.

HE ASKED a few more questions. Yes, the shop was all locked up; she made no effort to understand her husband's business. No, Victor had never consulted Marco Wells on legal affairs, nor was he in any way interested in politics. She had never even seen Mrs. Wells, and knew nothing whatsoever about her tragic death. She expected Victor to arrive home some time Sunday evening.

"In an airplane, he comes, Mr. Ix—a big airplane! What he will have to tell me! Ah, a wonderful friend, Mr. Wells—wonderful!"

As he plodded back along Poulter Street toward the center of town, Sam puzzled over what he had heard. The apparent gesture of goodwill on the part

of Marco Wells he recognized at once for what it was—a sham. Wells must have known, from the date the trial was set, that even with an acquittal he would not be free before the last week in March. He had not bought tickets and made reservations to use himself, but with the deliberate intention of giving them to Victor Myrzan.

Sam knew, too, that all of Marco's talk about the virtues and rewards of friendship was the bunk. Wells was a lawyer and a politician, and had a politician's idea of a friend; someone for whom you do a favor in return for, if possible, a bigger favor. He had sent George Fredericks around with that gift of a prepaid trip to Florida, not because Myrzan was such a dear friend of his, but because he had received, or expected to receive, something of at least equal value in return. The question that puzzled Sam was; what favor could a little glazier with no political connections possibly offer to a man like Marco Wells in any way commensurate with a two-week, paid-up vacation at a luxury hotel on the east coast of Florida?

He was still puzzling over the question when he came to the corner of Main Street, where a round blue plaque indicated the presence of a telephone booth, inside. He had entered and was feeling in his pocket for a nickel before he remembered that Roger Theall had spoken of driving into the city for dinner. He would not be able to reach his boss on the telephone and talk over this latest inexplicable development. He would have to decide for himself what, if anything, to do about it. And he would have to decide right now.

He came out to the street, stood looking irresolutely up and down the crowded sidewalks for a moment. Then he walked two blocks to the parking lot where he kept his car, climbed into it, and drove rapidly out Route 73 toward the municipal airport!

At the trial, the next morning, Marco Wells resumed the witness stand. He was attired in the same gray suit, but today wore a red polka-dot tie. He wore likewise an even firmer air of calm and fortified confidence. The few questions on the subject of his relations with Miss Coone, which the assistant D. A. was

able to squeeze past the objections of defense counsel, disturbed him not one whit.

Within less than thirty minutes he was excused; the State rested, and the defense did likewise. The judge called for the summations.

Young Dave Bryan seemed discouraged and grim, but he warmed up as he spoke. He made the most of what he had, and he had a good deal. He pointed out that the defendant, by his own admission, had been driven by the strongest of motives to murder his wife. He made the most of the fingerprints on the fatal gun, confessedly belonging to Marco Wells. He reminded the jury that Mrs. Wells had been shot in her boudoir, not in the living room or the foyer of her apartment. Her assailant therefore had been someone with means of entering the locked door and walking into her bedroom unopposed.

IN FACT, he built up a complete and solid circumstantial case against Marco Wells—with one exception. He avoided the subject of the lawyer's alibi for the period between four-thirty and five, for the simple reason that he could do nothing with it.

When he finished, court recessed for lunch.

Sidney Tohler opened the afternoon session by summing up for the defense. What Bryan had dodged, he harped on. Taking his cue from the accused's own statement of the day before, he admitted that the State had what looked like a beautiful case—except for the fact that Wells had never left his office. He reminded the jury of the floor plan of the Marsden Building which had been shown to them, showing the location of the window which permitted those waiting in the outer office to see Wells sitting at his desk at all times. He waved a plump hand toward the two key witnesses.

"They are established members of the community, business men of this city. They are friends of the accused, yes, but they have testified under oath, testified to the truth; their duty as citizens. To that extent, gentlemen of the jury, you too are friends of the accused. I ask you to do your duty; to set him free!"

THE ATTORNEY sat down, mopping his pudgy face. The jury sat back to listen to the judge's charge. Their expressions were grim and serious. If anything, they appeared to reflect a touch of frustration. Studying them intently, Dave Bryan felt that he had lost. He read their mood. Convinced that Wells was guilty, yet they were going to be forced, by virtue of his unshakable alibi, to acquit him.

The judge covered the legal aspects of the evidence briefly. Wasting few words, he made plain the necessary decision. He held up for them the three essentials: motive, opportunity, intent. Lacking any one of these three, they must acquit.

He stopped speaking, and reached for his gavel. Some of the jurymen pushed back their chairs. At that moment there was a bustle at the rear of the courtroom. A tall, tow-headed young man with a pug nose, whom the judge recognized as a reporter for the local newspaper, pushed through the group standing in the doorway and trotted down the aisle.

He held up a hand and cried, "Hold everything, your Honor!"

The judge frowned, and lifted his gavel. This was a most undignified proceeding for a high court. He was on the point of ordering a bailiff to silence the intruder, but then he paused.

The blond young man squirmed through the press enclosure and leaned over the railing to whisper into the ear of the assistant D. A. Dave Bryan's expression reflected in turn puzzlement, incredulity, astonishment, and then excitement. He sprang to his feet.

"Your Honor, the State wishes to call another witness."

The judge was plainly annoyed. He had had previous experience with attorneys who rushed an added witness in at the last minute, generally with inconsequential testimony, just to impress the jury.

"Why was this witness not called earlier, if the prosecutor was aware that his testimony was pertinent?"

"Your Honor, the State was not aware of the existence of this witness until sixty seconds ago. From information just received, this witness has been deliberately concealed, nearly a thou-

sand miles outside the state, by the friends of the accused. His testimony is believed important enough to alter this whole case."

The judge raised his eyebrows. He was accustomed to listening to exaggerations, and was not anxious to prolong proceedings any more than necessary. However, he was bound to see justice done. He consented.

Dave Bryan, holding a card that Sam Ix had just handed him, faced the rear of the room.

"The State calls Victor Myrzadani!" he said.

Amid a breathless hush, with all eyes turned his way, a little man shuffled uncertainly down the aisle, guided by the bailiff to whom Sam Ix had confided him, out in the corridor.

He was not a man to attract attention under any but the most extraordinary circumstances. He wore a badly pressed seersucker suit, high black shoes, and carried a rusty Homburg hat in his hand. He was short, and slightly stoop-shouldered from a lifetime of bending over a work-bench. He had a flat, uncompromising nose, watery gray eyes, and rather prominent yellowish teeth which showed when the corner of his mouth twitched nervously.

The bailiff led him to the witness chair. He started to sit down, but was instructed to stand up long enough to take the oath. His husky, "I do," was barely audible past the first row.

The judge motioned him into the chair. He sat himself on the very edge, his gnarled hands braced on his knees, and stared about him in obvious dismay. At the press table, Sam crossed his fingers.

Sam had asked the little fellow a lot of questions, but had given very little information himself. For one thing, he did not wish to be accused of coaching the witness. For another, he had not dared to disclose the true motive for dragging the glazier back from Florida, lest he refuse to come. Now he almost wished that he had coached a little. Victor was almost too nervous to speak.

Bryan approached and, to put him at his ease, started with simple questions about his name, his home, his business. The answer came in a taut whisper. Then, abruptly, the attitude of the wit-

ness changed. In roaming the room, his eyes finally found a face that he knew. Marco Wells sat deep in his chair, his eyes half closed, his mouth twisted into a snarl. But Victor recognized him instantly, and knew that he was among friends.

He relaxed in the witness chair, his tension eased off, and his voice recovered its normal volume.

QUICKLY the D. A. noting the cause of the change, put his next question. "You are acquainted with Marco Wells, the defendant here?"

"Oh, yes, yes! He is friend of mine; business friend."

"You sometimes did business with Mr. Wells?"

"Yes, I work for him two, three times. Glass in his car, and I have installed special window in his office."

The last statement was made with obvious pride.

"I see. You put in that special window, between his office and the waiting-room. And when was that?"

"Two years ago, come May—perhaps June."

"And when did you last see Mr. Wells?"

The answer was so prompt as to startle even the judge. "Last autumn; the seventh of October. The afternoon."

Dave Bryan drew a deep breath before asking his next question.

"Tell us how you happened to see him that day?"

"He telephone my shop right after lunch. He tell me his window is broken, the special window; please to come and fix it. I go right away to his office, to measure. Mr. Wells is there. Somebody has pushed a chair into the glass; it is all broken in pieces. I take out the pieces; Mr. Wells ask if I can fix new glass right away. I tell him I must go back to shop, cut right size. He say maybe he will be busy that afternoon, with customers; I should come back after office hours, after five o'clock. I say okay."

He paused, but continued when Bryan nodded at him.

"I have brought with me big sheet masonite, to stop draught and noises

while there is no glass. I nail it over opening."

Bryan halted him for a moment, to explain what masonite was; then indicated that he was to continue.

"I cut the sheet of glass in my shop; joost right. I go back to Marsden Building about fifteen past five, maybe twenty. Nobody is in Mr. Wells office. But I do much work in that building; I know where janitor keeps pass-key. I go in office, take down masonite, put in glass all nice with putty. I lock up again and I go home."

"And when you returned to that office, after five o'clock, the sheet of masonite was still nailed in the window, where you had put it?"

"It is always right where I nailed it, yes. I have driven the nails very carefully, so as not to hurt frame, you see."

"Then that afternoon, no one sitting outside could have seen into Mr. Wells private office through that window, could they?"

The witness stared at him as if he thought him slightly dense.

"Nobody can see through masonite, mister."

Dave Bryan knew when he had a point. He turned away with a sweeping gesture toward the defense counsel. "Your witness."

Sidney Tohler climbed to his feet. He had just received a terrific, unexpected shock. His flabby cheeks were pale, his tone low.

"What date did you say that was?"

"October seventh, last year."

"My friend, last October is a long way back—six months, in fact. How does it happen that you remember the exact date so clearly?"

The little glazier showed his yellow teeth in a slow smile. His reply was meat for headlines.

"That is my anniversary, October seven. Twenty years, last fall, I am married to my wife. She is telling me all afternoon, do not come late to the table. A special dinner she fixes for me, that night. Wiener schnitzel, mit potato pancakes." He beamed around the room, as if he would have been proud to invite any man to his home. "A very fine cook, my wife. Her wiener schnitzel—ah-h-h-h!"



ONE RING FOR DEATH

"It seems so underhanded, somehow, running away like this—almost as if . . . we were thieves!"

by **ROGER DEE**

BURTON was waiting in the kitchen, his bag packed and ready, when Peggy Lane's coupe crunched up the driveway and stopped, lights out, at the back of his house. At the sound of the car motor, he checked his watch against the electric clock that hung on

the wall just above the new buzzer he had installed for Eva.

It was eight-twenty—Peggy was exactly on schedule.

He let her in quickly, feeling some of his uneasy tension leave him at sight of her. She was frightened, as much afraid

as he was, but there was resolution in her face and her dark eyes were steady on his. She came inside, hurrying ahead of a blast of icy November wind, her gloved hands reaching for his. Her bag, a small, round shoulder-strap affair, swung between them momentarily, brushing Burton's arm with reassuring intimacy.

"Vic, darling!" Her husky voice was concerned, with a little catch in it she could not suppress. "Vic, are you ready? You haven't overlooked anything you'll need?"

He tapped the bag on the floor with his foot, his toe nudging the raw oblong where he had scraped away the gilt-stamped letters of his name, "Victor A. Burton," from the dark leather. The heavy carving knife he had used for the scraping lay on top of the electric refrigerator, near the dining-room door.

"It's all there, darling," he said. He managed a smile with stiff lips, but his voice had a thinness that startled him. "Everything I'll need for a couple of weeks. Beginning Monday, the Citizens' Bank of Compton can start looking for another cashier. They'll never find this one after a thirty-six hour start!"

He didn't add, as he could have, that the Citizens' Bank of Compton would also be looking for the twenty thousand dollars he had packed in his bag between layers of clean shirts, as well as for the five thousand he had invested and lost before tonight. Time enough to tell Peggy about that later, when they were safely away.

He had been afraid to tell her before, for fear he could not hold her, and he could not bear the idea of facing his future alone. It was on her account that he had stolen in the first place, trying to get his hands on enough money to break away from his wife's miserly dole.

Peggy tried to answer his smile, but her face quivered so that she gave up the attempt.

"I wish there were some other way, Vic," she said. "It seems so—so underhanded, somehow, our running away in the night like this. Almost as if—as if we were thieves."

He patted her hand reassuringly. "You're feeling sorry for Eva already," he chided her. "Forget her, Peggy. If Eva had treated me halfway decently, I wouldn't be running out on her now."

His mind dipped back unbidden, summing up his past injuries. Eva was forty-five, ten years older than himself, and she controlled the family finances with an iron hand. She had never been attractive, and when it came to her finally that Burton had married her for her money, she had become a shrew overnight. His only peaceful moments from that time on were the ones he spent at the bank, and his only happy ones those he stole with Peggy Lane.

He thought with vindictive satisfaction that Eva would suffer when she returned home tomorrow and found him gone, and that she would suffer still more when next week's audit discovered his embezzlements and she was pointed out on the streets of Compton as the wife of a thief.

Peggy brought him back to the present by squeezing his hand.

"We'd better go, Vic," she urged. "I'm afraid here. I— Really, Vic, we ought to hurry, don't you think?"

He laughed again, feeling suddenly invincible, above caution. A two-hour drive to the city in Peggy's car and they would be gone beyond tracing, leaving Compton to stew in its own juicy gossip.

"Let's have a drink first to celebrate the occasion," he said. "It'll only take a minute, Peggy. We've got plenty of time."

He moved away before she could protest, gathering glasses and ice cubes and a half-empty bottle. Peggy caught at his arm as he went past her toward the sink, holding him back.

"Please, Vic," she begged. "Let's go now and get it over with. There's plenty of time for this later."

He set the bottle and glasses down hard on the sink drainboard, freeing his hands, and pulled her to him. She resisted for a moment and then gave in passionately, her lips parted and her eyes closed.

"There's plenty of time later, yes," Burton breathed against the soft curve of her throat. "But it's so hard to wait, darling!"

They were still locked tight in their embrace when the door from the dining room opened and Eva Burton came into the kitchen.

EVA screamed, a hoarse furious sound that tore them apart like a physical

violence. She came in on them with a clumsy, purposeful rush, her heavy face mottled with rage, her square unfeminine body shaking uncontrollably.

They moved back from her, dazed by the abruptness of her entrance, Peggy Lane crying out sharply in her terror.

Eva Burton followed, still screaming, and threw herself upon her husband, tearing viciously at his face with her nails. The sheer weight of her attack drove him back against the sink.

He recovered his balance and flung her away, sent her spinning into the refrigerator. She caught at it for support, and her clutching hand fell upon the heavy carving knife he had used to scrape his name from the traveling bag. She brought it around in front of her, light dancing wickedly on the sharp blade, her eyes still fastened to her husband's face.

The refrigerator clicked into life, its smooth hum loud in the taut silence.

Burton's scream almost matched her own. "No, Eva! Don't! *Eva, for Heaven's sake—*"

She lunged at him with the knife, raw fury numbing all sense of discretion.

Burton dodged, barely avoiding the stabbing blade, and struck back with all his strength. The blow took her at the point of her heavy chin and slammed her across the room again, against the gas range this time.

She fell limply, her head striking heavily against the rounded porcelain corner of the stove, and lay still on the polished tile of the floor. Burton stood looking down at her expectantly, but she did not move.

Peggy Lane made a small choked sound behind him and collapsed on a kitchen chair, sobbing uncontrollably. The shoulder strap of her bag slipped down her lax arm and the bag thumped to the floor, wedging between her chair and the sink cabinets.

In falling, Eva Burton brushed against the front panel of the gas range, the impact of her body wrenching over the control valve to the oven burners. Gas hissed out into the room, its sibilance loud above the gentle purring of the refrigerator, until Burton reached out automatically and turned it off. The smell of free gas hung heavy in the room.

There was a sudden rapid clumping of

feet outside on the front porch and a buzzer under the wall clock rang stridently, jerking Burton's attention away from the woman on the floor. He could see the buzzer's flat unweighted armature vibrating, blurred by its own speed, and the fat blue spark at its contact points startled him with a sudden, half-understood significance. If enough gas had escaped from the oven, the spark would have ignited it, and—

THE BUZZER quieted and rang again before Burton realized that someone was at the front door, and that ignoring the ringing when the house was lighted would attract suspicion. He went out of the kitchen hurriedly, through the dining room and down the hallway to the front door.

It was Eddie Fay, the delivery boy from Hausmann's grocery three blocks down the street. He held a cardboard box of groceries in his leather-jacketed arms, and his thin face was blue with cold. His bicycle was propped against the steps behind him.

"Mrs. Burton stopped at the store on her way home and ordered this," he said when Burton opened the door. "Said she got home earlier than she expected, and she'd need some of it tonight."

Burton took the box and closed the door, watching through the glass while the boy went down the steps beating his hands together and blowing a white plume of his own breath before him. Eddie had mounted his bicycle and disappeared down the street before Burton went back to the kitchen.

He returned to find Peggy Lane bending over the still form of his wife. She turned a white, shocked face toward him when he came in, her lips forming words almost without sound.

"She's dead, Vic! There's no—no pulse!"

He set the box of groceries on the sink and ran his fingers through his hair. The confusion of shock was leaving him now, and he could think again. He shook Peggy's hands away impatiently when she reached out toward him, her eyes begging for reassurance.

"What will we do, Vic? They'll call it murder!"

He said, "Shut up!" gruffly and closed

his eyes, concentrating desperately. He had been thinking of something in the brief instant while the buzzer rang, something that—

A hot blue spark in a room full of gas!

BURTON caught Peggy by the shoulders, his face inches from hers.

"Listen, darling, there's a way out of this. A safe way, better than we could have planned. We'll make Eva's—death—look like an accident, and we won't have to run away at all. We can wait a decent interval and be married legally. Will you listen, now, and do exactly as I say?"

She shook her head numbly, her eyes sick with horror.

"We can't—we couldn't do that, Vic! It wouldn't be—" She bit her lip, trying to find words. "Vic, don't try to hide it. It'll only bring more trouble! It was self-defense, I can swear to that!"

"It wouldn't do, Peggy, can't you see it?" He shook her, ungently. "It would bring out everything about you and me, and the police would call it murder anyway. They'd say I killed Eva to get her out of our way. Even if I came clear we'd both be ruined in Compton, and I couldn't start fresh anywhere else. Who would hire an unconvicted murderer?"

She stared back at him with understanding growing in her eyes, realizing the danger they faced. Burton watched her reaction narrowly, thinking:

"I'll return the money to the bank tonight. With Eva's death an accident I'll inherit from her, and I can make up my old deficits before the audit. It's perfect—and it will leave me free!"

Peggy nodded reluctantly, and he drew a sharp breath of relief. He would have told her, if forced to it, that he could not afford the time a court trial would use up. A few days delay now in getting his hands on Eva's estate and it would be too late to beat the audit. Eva's death *had* to be accidental.

Peggy listened mutely while he talked, her eyes clinging to his, and nodded obediently when he had finished.

"I suppose it's the only way, Vic, but it still doesn't seem right," she said. "We're responsible for her death, and now we're doing this to her!"

He led her outside, unresisting, and put her into the car. He took her white face

between his hands and kissed her fiercely before closing the car door after her.

"Go straight home," he said. "And hang on tight until I call you, Peggy. It's going to be all right."

He stood with the raw winter wind whipping his hair until her car had left the driveway and passed out of sight under the corner street lamp. Then he went inside again and closed the door.

He put the ugly carving knife away in an overhead cabinet and checked and rechecked swiftly through the box of groceries on the sink. He would have to ask for something at Hausmann's grocery that Eva might have forgotten, and it wouldn't do to duplicate an item.

Satisfied, he raised the enameled cover of the gas range and blew out the two little pilot lights, turning on a single burner when he had lowered the cover again. Raw gas hissed out, its smell burning his nostrils and filling the room instantly.

He caught up his bag and went out through the dining room, closing the door carefully behind him. He unpacked the bag swiftly in his bedroom, stuffed crisp sheaves of bills into a leather brief case, and went out with the brief case under his arm.

On the front porch, he paused a moment to stare fixedly at the little marbled disc of the bell push, almost invisible against the glossy white wood of the door frame.

Its potentialities fascinated him. A few minutes more now and touching it would be like throwing the detonator switch on a charge of dynamite. The hot blue spark of the buzzer inside would leave the kitchen a shambles, and no one could possibly suspect that his wife's death was other than an accident.

He would be safely away from the house, with witnesses, when the explosion came.

HE WALKED the three blocks to Compton's tiny downtown business center in five minutes, turning in at Hausmanns' grocery. The Citizens' Bank lay just across the street, and in its nearness lay the strength of his alibi.

Hausmann met him at the door, his round face beaming like a rosy, white-whiskered apple.

"My wife forgot to order butter when she stopped here a few minutes ago," Burton told him. "She's quite anxious to get it tonight, too. Can you send it over right away?"

Strangely, he was less tense now than he had been while he waited for Peggy to come for him. But he had been faced then with the dismal prospect of a fugitive's existence, while now the solution to his problem was going into action with the precision of clockwork.

Hausmann bobbed his head understandingly. "Yes sir, Mr. Burton, right away." He turned and bawled: "Albert! Front!"

"I could have phoned, of course," Burton said easily, "but I have some extra work to do at the bank tonight, and I thought I'd stop in on the way instead."

He had turned to go, the last detail of his alibi planted, when the delivery boy came scurrying up from the back room. Burton frowned uncertainly at sight of him. It was not Eddie Fay but a new boy, dull-faced and slack-mouthed, wearing round, heavy glasses with very thick lenses.

"Albert will be right over, Mr. Burton," Hausmann said. Then, seeing Burton's look, he added, "Albert only works Saturdays, Mr. Burton, helping Eddie Fay. He don't see so good, maybe, but I hire him because his mother needs the money. He'll get there all right."

Burton left the store and crossed the windy street, resisting the desire to run. He looked back only when he had unlocked the front door of the bank, to see the bespectacled Albert riding away on his bicycle, a dirty canvas carrying bag slung across his shoulders. Three or four minutes now, five at the most, and the danger would be over.

He hurried through the dark first floor of the bank, past the short row of tellers' cages, and switched on an overhead light above the vault. With the click of the light his stage setting was completed. Hausmann, across the street, would swear to his being at work in the bank when the blast came.

Burton spun the dial of the vault—it had no time lock—and replaced the twenty thousand dollars carefully in the box from which he had taken it not three

[Turn page]

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hours before. With the slam of the vault door he was running upstairs to his own cubbyhole office on the second floor, looking out through an unlighted window across the flat top of Hausmann's grocery toward his own house.

He could see his white front porch clearly in the light of the corner street lamp, and as he watched he saw Albert pedal his bicycle through the cone of light and turn into the driveway. Burton drew a long, slow breath and held it unconsciously until the boy propped his bicycle against a porch column and from his shoulder bag as he went up.

"This is it," Burton thought. "Once he climbed the steps, taking a small package touches that little white button, it's all over!"

The boy raised his hand and knocked on the door.

Burton stiffened, torn with a sudden dreadful premonition. The near-sighted fool hadn't seen the bell-push! Suppose he left the butter at the door and went back to Hausmann's without finding the button at all?

He crouched in the window for a shivering eternity, sweating with suspense while the boy alternately knocked and listened, knocked and listened. His whole attention was centered tightly on the boy at his door, and his taut nerves twanged viciously when the telephone rang on the desk behind him.

WHIRLING, Burton stared at the instrument incredulously, shocked cold. A long moment went by before he gathered his wits enough to realize that it had to be either Peggy Lane or old Hausmann, because only those two knew where he was. He took up the telephone with a hand that shook violently.

Peggy's voice came over the wire, trembling at the edge of hysteria.

"Vic? . . . Vic, darling! I was afraid to call you. But I just got home, and when I got out of the car I couldn't—"

He cut her off impatiently, not knowing what was wrong but feeling the cold fingers of panic clutching at his stomach.

"Yes, yes, what is it? What's wrong, Peggy?"

"Vic, I—I couldn't find my bag! It wasn't in the car at all. Do you suppose

I— Vic, did I leave it there in the kitchen?"

He started convulsively and let the telephone clatter unnoticed on the desk. He had forgotten Peggy's bag completely when he hurried her out of the house. It still lay on the kitchen floor where she had dropped it, and there was no way of knowing what the blast might do to it.

It might be torn open and its contents scattered, so that even a casual inspection by police or firemen must discover the tickets and compartment reservations Peggy had bought for their flight. It would mean an instant investigation, and how could he explain Peggy's presence at the scene of his wife's death?

He whirled to the window, remembering the boy on his porch, and drew a tremulous breath of relief when the boy replaced the package in his bag and walked down the steps. His bicycle was back under the street lamp when Burton picked up the telephone again.

"I'll go back and get it," he mouthed into the transmitter. "Sit tight, darling, it'll only take a minute. The boy came with the butter but didn't ring the bell. There's been no explosion. I'll call you back."

He dropped the instrument into its cradle, ignoring Peggy's frantic voice, and ran down the steps. Unlocking the bank's big front door took another nightmare eternity, and once out he did not stop to relock it but ran headlong down the street without looking back.

He still had time to take Peggy's bag from the kitchen and get out. He could work out another plan that did not depend upon an idiot grocery boy. He could push the button himself, if necessary.

The slack-faced Albert was rolling his bicycle into Hausmann's store as Burton sprinted down the other side of the street, but Burton, seeing him, had no time to care.

He passed the first street intersection and plunged into the shadows of the second block, between corner lamps. At the end of the second block the icy air was burning his panting lungs and his heart hammered wildly, but he could not slacken his speed. Every second counted now.

He whirled into his own driveway, throwing a quick, searching look behind

[Turn page]

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him. He could see nothing past the glare of the street lamp, but his own immediate block was clear. The night was silent except for the soft moan of the wind and the thunder of his pulse in his ears.

He stumbled up the back steps of his house and wrenched open the kitchen door, holding his breath against the overpowering rush of gas that met him.

Peggy's bag lay where she had dropped it, wedged between the sink cabinets and the back rungs of the metal kitchen chair, not six feet from the limp, motionless body of his wife. He caught it up, turning toward the kitchen door with a great sigh of relief.

For the second time that night he heard the sudden thumping of feet on his front porch, and with the sound he knew instantly what had happened. Eddie Fay had returned while Albert was out, and Hausmann, disgusted with the new boy's stupidity, had sent Eddie back again with that infernal pound of butter.

Burton dropped the bag, stunned, his eyes turning inevitably to the buzzer on the wall.

He never saw the fat blue spark of contact.

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS



MURDER OFF HONDURAS

A Gripping Novelet

By DAVID DODGE

THE DEAD DON'T DIE

A Mystery Novelet

By BRUNO FISCHER

CHEESECAKE AND WILLIE

A Willie Klump Howler

By JOE ARCHIBALD

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KILL ME NEXT TIME

(Continued from page 74)

Is the past. But, Lacey, how the devil did you spot him? Did you know all about him?"

"No," I said. "No, because I'd only seen him once. One day a number of years ago, I happened to be attending the Line-Up with my friend, Captain Sol Bierman. Haven was one of those who passed under the lights. Some woman had accused him of blackmail and had him taken in. Whether he got out of that one I never bothered to find out. But, today, when I met him—well, something clicked. Later, when I realized the possible set-up here—you telling me of your granddaughter asking for money—something else clicked. So while you went for my bag, I called Bierman and got Haven's description. It matched with my hunch. So, I set the trap. He had tried to get me at the pool. And if he thought he had, what better than to get you the same way? Well, he thought he had, that's all."

GEORGE B. TAYLOR gave me a long look, and I could tell he was now grateful to the bottom of his heart because I hadn't shot Haven in the arm, or leg, or some place like that.

Then, suddenly, he blew out air, and glared at his granddaughter.

"Confound it, Alice," he barked. "I'm too blasted old for much of this sort of thing. Why in the devil don't you get married to some nice boy I'd like? Somebody—somebody like that Monroe fellow. Now there's a right fine lad in my opinion. Why don't—"

Her strangled scream of joy, and her flying the few feet into his arms, cut off the rest of Taylor's words.

"Oh, Granddad darling, darling!" she cried. "Bill and I have been too petrified—too scared to tell you for fear of what you might say or do. But we were married secretly a year ago. Oh, Granddad, darling!"

"What?" the old guy thundered. "What? You mean to tell me—"

I had slipped out the door by then, because what went on from there was

[Turn page]



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strictly family stuff, and none of the Lacey's business.

Well, I stayed at Ellwood the rest of the weekend. And as the guest of honor. Naturally! And when I went back to town, I had in my pocket not a check for five thousand, but for ten.

Yes indeed, a beautiful, wonderful weekend, brother!

THE GUN WAS LOST

(Continued from page 65)

him and quickly handcuffed him. Nova was groggy from McCann's powerful punch.

French piled him into a chair.

"By the Lord Harry," marvelled French admiringly as he pounded McCann on the back, "that was one of the most daring things I ever expected to see. Imagine walking right into a killer's gun. Mac, I'm proud of you!"

"You won't be," said McCann with a grin. "Not when I tell you that I removed the firing pin. I wanted him to give himself away."

"Where'd you get that second barrel?" asked French.

"Well," grinned McCann as he picked up the pistol and pulled the slide rearward and exposed the barrel. "When I saw that this barrel was a new barrel and that the bluing had not yet worn off, and also that the end of the muzzle was not worn smooth, I had a hunch that Nova had shot Cogganov with the regular barrel, then switched barrels and had fired the five shots into the ground. That would account for the fifteen minute interval reported by Nyamu. He probably wanted to show that the gun wasn't new when he shot into the ground. I imagine that he thought the firing would burn off the bluing and cover up the barrel's newness. But it didn't."

"Is that the regular barrel?" asked French pointing to the barrel on the desk.

"It is," said McCann. "I took it into the laboratory just before I came in here and they made a test firing. The rifling on a bullet fired from this barrel was identical with the rifling on the bullet taken from Cogganov's body."

"Where in the devil did you find the barrel?" asked French.

"That was easy," said McCann. "I went down to the army barracks and had Captain Macumber lend me a mine detector and a couple of his experts. We went up to the place where I found the empty shells, and luck was with us. We found the barrel buried between the roots of the sour plum tree. We didn't have to hunt very far."

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 7)

knife came at the same time as, to its hilt, the knife drove home!

That's the kind of exciting action that made every page of MURDER OFF HONDURAS a spine-tingling thriller. It's terrific action, suspense, drama all the way through as man and girl battle against killers loose in a lawless, claw-and-fang corner of the world—where knives, guns and treachery rule!

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Letters from Readers

THANKS, pals, for all your letters. As I sit here at my desk, two big mailbags full are here on the floor beside me. Though I can't publish all of them here, I'm personally going to drop each and every one of you a note, because I appreciate your friendliness in writing. Your comments and suggestions have made and will help keep **POPULAR DETECTIVE** the leading magazine of its kind in the world today!

Dear Editor: **MURDER ON FOUR WHEELS**, by William Degenhard, in the latest issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, is my idea of one swell story! It's different. **TIMID KILLER**, by John Di Silvestro I rate as excellent, too. That is another story that is different. Keep giving us that kind—stories that are different. I'm tired of stories about wisecracking private detectives who are sitting in their office with a bottle of Scotch and wondering how they are going to pay their rent when in trips a lovely babe, lays five crisp one-hundred dollar bills on his desk and asks him to solve a murder. Then it usually turns out that it's the lovely babe who is the killer, though why she ever wanted to hire the private eye, I dunno. Into the ashcan with stories like that!—Hendrick O. MacIntosh, Jr., Austin, Texas.

I second the motion, Hendrick!

Dear Editor: What's the matter with having a ghost or so in a story as long as there's a logical, natural explanation at the end? I disagree with Joe Mackey who is 'agin' ghosts. Keep the supernatural out, yes. But a story like **SAM RALL'S PRIVATE GHOST**, where all is explained at the end, what's the matter with that?—Sam Stick, Hyde Park, N. Y.

Maybe the answer is that a story that has a logical, reasonable explanation at the end really isn't a ghost story. Or do you have different ideas?

Dear Editor: I have just finished reading **MURDER ON FOUR WHEELS** in your latest issue. It is good stuff. How about a murder mystery involving the crew of a crack train? There is widespread interest in trains and railroads among your readers, Mr. Editor, I am sure, and with one of your good authors at work on it, it should make a humdinger of a tale. And while I'm prescribing, how about some stories

with a circus background?—Fred J. LeFave, Louisville, Ky.

Not a bad idea, Fred. But let's wait and see what other readers have to say about it.

Dear Editor: How long do fingerprints last? I'm involved in a case which happened several years ago, but I'm sure I know who is responsible. This man . . . did it. The water glass involved hasn't been touched, though it happened five years ago. Would any fingerprints on it still be there?—S.M.V., Miami, Fla.

Thanks for your card, S.M.V. According to my best information, fingerprints may last indefinitely. But I suggest that when you return home, you see your local law enforcement officer.

That's all for now, but I'll be back next issue with many, many more letters. All comments and criticisms are welcomed here, so don't be shy. Let's hear from you! Address all letters and postcards to The Editor, POPULAR DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y.

See you all next issue, and until then—thanks, folks, and good luck to everybody! —THE EDITOR.

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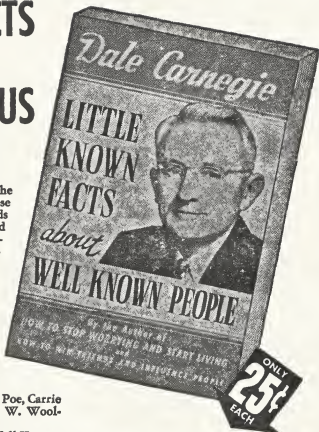
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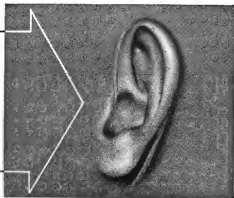
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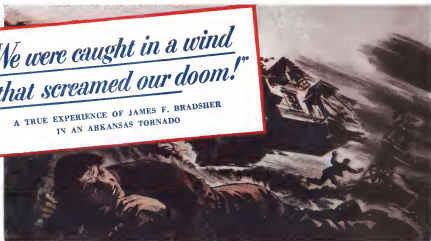
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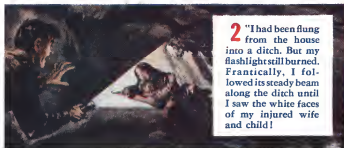


*"We were caught in a wind
that screamed our doom!"*

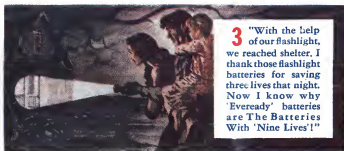
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